

PASSIONATE PREACHING: APPLYING THE METHODS OF PERFORMANCE ACTING TO PREACHING PREPARATION

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by

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Abstract

Passionate Preaching: Applying the Methods of Performance Acting to Preaching Preparation

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The thesis for this project is that performance preparation methods in acting can enhance the ability of the preacher to communicate on a deeper spiritual level. This project combines the methods of acting that have built on the foundation laid by Constantine Stanislavsky in the early 20th century, and the basic research methods currently taught in seminary education. This project will show how these areas of study overlap with one another. At the same time, performative preparation methods can inform sermon preparation methods to help preachers create sermons that are more inspirational and truthful in their communication.

A study of the literature and resources published by acting teachers and performative preaching professors are in conversation with one another throughout this project. From this conversation a syllabus and workshops can be found in the Appendix to provide a variety of ways to share and apply the results of this project in academic and continuing education forums for students and pastors. Homiletics professor and performative method advocate, Richard Ward was interviewed. The results of his interview were used to compare his teaching methods and experience with mine.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. *Death* is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.¹

—Jerry Seinfeld

Speaking in front of people is dangerous and risky. *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods* by Richard Brestoff says, “. . . the actor has been considered slightly crazy for deliberately putting himself in harm's way.”² If an actor is crazy for performing, what does that say about the preacher? A preacher is called to put himself or herself in front of a congregation to speak on behalf of *God*. The danger is that the preacher may not be able to communicate well or correctly what God wants communicated.

Problem Addressed by the Project

This project incorporates acting methods with preaching preparation to transform uninspiring, unimaginative, and untruthful sermon communication into inspiring, imaginative, and truthful messages.

Importance of the Problem

Preaching *is* a dangerous task to perform. The stakes are high when a person is a type of transmitter between God and the congregation and vice versa. *Performance* is a

¹ Jerry Seinfeld, *I'm Telling You for the Last Time--Live on Broadway*, DVD (New York: HBO Home Video, 1998).

² Richard Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods* (Lyme, NH: Smith & Kraus, 1996), 1.

French word that literally means “carry through to completion.”³ Preachers are trying to carry the stories of God and the call of action from God to the people. Preachers are also trying to reflect the needs of the congregation back to God. To complete these tasks well, the role and action of preaching must be vibrantly clear.

Historically, those who are called to preach to the people have been a part of major movements and covenants that bring forth justice. Those who speak on behalf of God are willing to speak out against the social norms that are not building good relationships with God. They are willing to be a mirror that reflects what is both good and bad in society. These preachers have given hope to the hopeless, voice to the voiceless, and light in the darkness. They have lived lives that stir up deep emotions and questions. Some have even died because of their calling.

How can a task that is so challenging, fascinating, and risky be so boring in many worship experiences? This is the question that plagued me, prior to this project, when I would hear a preacher comment after a boring sermon that they really felt their prepared sermon had been “inspired by God.” I did not want my feedback to diminish their feeling, but at the same time I did not want to lower my expectations of God’s ability to move people. I came to realize that boring sermons resulted from the choices being made by the pastor preaching. These pastors may have been inspired during their preparation and presentation, but they did not have the self-awareness and tools needed to communicate consistently well the message God provided.

³ Richard F. Ward, *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 77.

The skills I learned as a Theatre Performance major in my undergraduate education at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, provided great preparation and a perspective on the role of the pastor and the task of preaching. Performance training gave me the tools to continuously understand my role in relation to the world of a play and other characters. All of these relationships onstage had to interact in active, honest, and truthful ways to be able to communicate clearly and move an audience. As a pastor I am constantly analyzing myself, my congregation, and the world around us so that we build meaningful relationships with one another and with God. Thus, good preachers strive to communicate God's message in active, honest, and truthful ways. Acting performance preparation methods can help enhance this communication.

Let's look at an example: Most people have the physical capacity to play the piano. Can everyone play the piano as competently as Beethoven? No. The basics of piano playing, however, can be acquired through skill, practice, and study. The more practice and study, the more beautiful and inspiring the music can become. The same is true of preaching. Most people can play notes on a piano just as most people can talk and move. To play the piano well and to speak and move well takes discipline and practice. It takes the ability to understand what is written on the paper and skills that use the body, mind, and soul to communicate truthfully to an audience. Just because a person can read the notes does not mean he or she knows how to play the piece well. A person may know how to write and speak, but when he or she prepares an inspired message, he or she may not know how to preach it effectively.

Thesis

My thesis is that performance preparation methods can enhance the ability of the preacher to communicate on a deeper spiritual level.

Work Previously Done in the Field

There are five homileticsians I refer to consistently throughout this paper, Charles Bartow, Jana Childers, Todd Farley, Clayton Schmit, and Richard Ward. These homileticsians see natural connections between performance methods and preaching, and their works seek to demonstrate how the skills found in acting are applicable to preaching.

Homiletics

Charles Bartow: Bartow served as the Carl and Helen Egner Professor of Speech Communication in Ministry at Princeton from 1991-2009. He was a founding member of the editorial boards of *Homiletic* and *The Journal of Communication and Religion*. Bartow is author of several books, including *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation*, *The Preaching Moment*, and *Effective Speech Communication in Leading Worship*. He was honored with a Festschrift and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Homiletics in the fall of 2008.⁴

Bartow was one of the first to publish works that brought together concepts found in performance with preaching. His work inspired many of the other homileticsians on this list. He wanted to find ways to bring the written word to life.

Jana Childers: Childers is the Professor of Homiletics and Speech Communication at San Francisco Theological Seminary. She is an ordained Presbyterian

⁴ Heather Roote Faller, "Farewell to Five Faculty Members, with Many Thanks," Princeton Theological Seminary, <http://www3.ptsem.edu/inSpireContent.aspx?id=3222> (accessed November 2, 2011).

Minister. She is the author of *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre*, co-editor of *The Abingdon Women's Preaching Annual, Series I*, and editor of *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on Creative Process* which was awarded the Religious Communication Association's Book of the Year award.⁵

Childers is the person who introduced me to this area of research and practice. Her work was the starting foundation for this paper.

Todd Farley: Farley began his ministry as a mime in 1978. He founded Mimeistry that uses mime as ministry throughout the world. He has taught at Calvin College, Fuller Theological Seminary, and at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. Farley is now serving the United Church of Christ in MI.⁶

Farley's skill in mime can help a preacher have basic tools for identifying gestures that communicate well. He can create a story upon a stage with just the use of his movement.

Clayton Schmit: Schmit is the Arthur DeKruyter/Christ Church Oak Brook Professor of Preaching and Academic Director of the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Schmit has published several books including *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life* (co-authored with Lauralee Farrer), *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church*, *Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression*, and *Public Reading of Scripture*. He coedited a research book called *Performing the Word: Bringing the Sermon to Life* with Jana Childers.

⁵ Jana Childers, "STFS Faculty," San Francisco Theological Seminary, http://www.sfts.edu/about/people_faculty.asp?ID=12 (accessed October 25, 2011).

⁶ Todd Farley, "About Todd," Todd Farley Online! <http://www.toddfarley.com/452/index.html> (accessed October 26, 2011).

All artistic forms have similar creative approaches. Schmit brings his love of other performative art forms to performative preaching.⁷

Richard Ward: Ward is the Fred B. Craddock Associate Professor of Homiletics and Worship at Philips Seminary. He is ordained in the United Church of Christ. Ward is the author of *Speaking from the Heart: Preaching with Passion* and *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching*. He is also the co-editor of *Craddock Stories* with Mike Graves and Fred Craddock. Ward serves on the Editorial Board for *Feasting on the Gospels* after serving on the board for *Feasting on the Word: A Lectionary Commentary Series* for Westminster John Knox Press.⁸

Ward has been using performance methods in his approach to the exegetical and hermeneutical study of scripture. His goal is to find a way to make sure preachers are preaching a “lively word.”

There are several acting teachers whose books were a part of my research and application process; Constantine Stanislavsky, Stella Adler, Uta Hagen, Robert Lewis, Sanford Meisner, Michael Shurtleff, Viola Spolin, Anne Bogart, David Mamet, and Tadashi Suzuki.

Acting

Constantine Stanislavsky (1863 –1938): Stanislavsky created what is known as the “method” or “system” for acting. A new way to discuss acting began with his work. Stanislavsky was born in Russia. His life was spent in the Russian theater as an actor and director. He is known for the books *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character*, *Creating a*

⁷ Clayton Schmit, “Faculty,” Fuller Theological Seminary, <http://fuller.edu/academics/faculty/clayton-schmit.aspx> (accessed October 25, 2011).

⁸ Richard F. Ward, “Directory of Faculty,” Phillips Theological Seminary, <http://ptstulsa.edu/faculty?ID=119> (accessed October 25, 2011).

Role and his biography *My Life in Art*. His books have been the foundation for the language used by actors as most acting strives to be truthful in nature.⁹

Stella Adler (1902 – 1992): Adler worked with Stanislavsky later in his life and argued that he had changed some of his initial methods, specifically those dealing with emotional memory exercises. Adler herself grew up on the stage as the daughter of two actors. Adler was one of the original members of the influential Group Theater (Harold Clurman, Sanford Meisner, and Lee Strasburg). In 1949 She began to open her own studios.¹⁰

Adler lived her life as an actress and saw it as a calling. Her way of speaking and approaching theatre is similar to the language and approaches used by those called to ministry.

Uta Hagen (1919 – 2004): Hagen taught at the Herbert Berghof Studio throughout her life as a successful actor and teacher. She won two Tony Awards and appeared in many movies and television shows. She wrote two books, *Respect for Acting* and *A Challenge for the Actor*.¹¹

Hagen is the acting voice that resonates most with me as she combines Stanislavsky's approach with how an actor should live life. Her focus on the five senses and using them daily as a way to gather information that can be performed on stage is the same way clergy should approach pastorates.

⁹ Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (Hollywood, CA: Quite Specific Media Group, 2007).

¹⁰ Brestoff, 117-18.

¹¹ "Uta Hagen," Women's International Center, <http://www.wic.org/bio/hagen.htm> (accessed November 2, 2011).

Robert Lewis (1909 – 1997): Lewis was another member of the Group Theatre and a founder of the Actors Studio in New York. He was also a professor at Sarah Lawrence College and Yale School of Drama.¹²

Lewis is primarily a professor. His approach to performance teaching parallels the approach of homiletic professors because they both work in academia. Therefore throughout this paper his voice is best able to sum up what thoughts need to be expressed.

Sanford Meisner (1905 – 1997): Meisner was born in Brooklyn, New York. He was part of the Group Theater in the 1930s. When Meisner created his own technique, he focused on helping actors create good instincts while being in *communion* (Stanislavsky's term) with one another.¹³ Meisner's method focuses on listening, responding, and creating correct impulses.

Michael Shurtleff (1920 – 2007): Shurtleff was the major casting director. He formed his own casting service, Casting Consultants, in 1962. In his book *Audition*, for which he perhaps is best known, Shurtleff addresses and solves the common problems for actors during the audition process, problems he had witnessed many times over in his casting sessions.¹⁴

Shurtleff's guideposts can help a preacher quickly get to the important communicative questions that need to be asked and performance elements that will help communicate the answers.

Viola Spolin (1906 – 1994): Spolin is known as the mastermind of improvisational theater and games. Her son formed one of the most famous improvisation

¹² Robert Lewis, *Advice to the Players* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989).

¹³ Brestoff, 128-30.

¹⁴ "Michael Shurtleff," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Shurtleff (accessed October 30, 2011).

groups in Chicago, IL called *Second City*. She brought a sense of playfulness to her work and teachings. She saw that some actors forgot how to play when seriously examining Stanislavsky's system.¹⁵

Spolin brings the importance of playfulness to acting and preaching. Good improvisation is an invaluable tool in life. Being playful is serious work. It requires many of the same types of openness and willingness to respond that good preachers need.

Three current voices in acting methods include:

Anne Bogart: Bogart has worked with Tina Landau and Tadashi Suzuki. Her work has helped her create what is called *Viewpoints*. This training method is used by the SITI Company that was cofounded in New York with Tadashi Suzuki.¹⁶

Bogart's *Viewpoints* were introduced to me in high school and became an integral part of my college education. Her technique is a multifaceted way to understand how movement and energy in that movement creates emotional responses in intentional and unintentional ways. The church is a space where energy and movement are part of the experience and should be approached with as much intentional awareness as possible.

David Mamet: Mamet is best known as a playwright. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Mamet is also a screenwriter, director, and has been nominated for two Academy Awards.¹⁷ Mamet makes loud political statements in his writings and life. He is known as someone who pushes the status quo. His book *True and False* is written to the working actor and used throughout this paper.¹⁸

¹⁵ Brestoff, 139-40.

¹⁶ "SITI Company," Rena Shagan Associate, <http://www.shaganarts.com/SITI-Company#SITI-Company/About> (accessed November 2, 2011).

¹⁷ "Awards for David Mamet," The Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000519/awards> (accessed November 2, 2011).

¹⁸ David Mamet, *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

Mamet's thought-provoking work makes him a significant person in the theatre world. He is an antagonist towards the methods of Stanislavsky, but his arguments are inconsistent. His work *True and False* is relevant because it deals with the working actor and not just those learning in a classroom setting.

Tadashi Suzuki: Suzuki brings to the ability to look both at Eastern and Western cultures for performance tools and techniques. Suzuki is from Japan and has been influenced by both Eastern and Western theatre. His theatre company in Toga, Japan is called the Suzuki Company of Toga. He has is also a founder of the American based SITI Company with Anne Bogart.¹⁹

Suzuki has reminded American theatre culture that it must sometimes look East and not always look West for important theatrical foundations. Suzuki's method is very physical. It is the theory behind his method that is most relevant to the church. As many mainline churches struggle with buildings that are too big and congregations that are too small, it is essential for a preacher to be aware of the importance of worship in a space that feels like home despite its imperfections.

These people have laid the foundation for this project. These voices work together to help create the language and methods that enhance the preaching event for all who are participating in the life of worship and the church. Preaching is an art and it requires skillful artists to be performed well.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

This project combines my voice with the voices listed above and brings them into conversation with one another. The information in this project will then be combined to

¹⁹ Tadashi Suzuki, "Tadashi Suzuki," SCOT: Suzuki Company of Toga, <http://www.scot-suzukicompany.com/en/profile.php> (accessed November 2, 2011).

create foundational ways to educate seminary students and current pastors in the performative preparation methods for preaching.

There is not just one “right” acting or preaching method. The major limitation is that there are many wonderful tools for preachers that come from acting. Each one could be its own project. Throughout this paper many methods are mentioned on the surface level. This paper is an entry point. It discusses how the fundamentals of preaching and performance overlap and how certain elements can work well together. If a preacher wants to study a specific method more extensively he or she must begin to make the connections throughout his or her own study of those methods.

Procedure of Integration

The work in this project has come from the research of homeliticians who have applied performance theory to their work. In addition, I have drawn upon years of study and observation as a theatre performance major, seminary student, and pastor.

Throughout this paper there are many basic performance tools discussed based primarily on the foundation of Stanislavsky. Current homiletic approaches are combined with the acting preparation methods. These tools are then put in syllabus and workshop forms in the appendix. Richard Ward was interviewed and his current syllabus and updated performance approaches are compared with the basics of my coursework. Ward has begun to reexamine his teaching style with the addition of online preaching education.

Chapter Outlines

A preacher and actor's primary tool is the self. The following chapter focuses on performance tools that allow a preacher to become more aware about the mental, emotional, and physical health of one's self.

The third chapter begins with an examination of the language that is used in performance and hermeneutical studies. The commonalities and differences found in the preaching and acting preparation process are discussed. Once the language comparisons have been completed, the next step is the application of performative methods to the preaching preparation process.

The fourth chapter presents a combination of some of the same methods used in writing the sermon with new helpful approaches to prepare for performance. After the sermon is written a preacher can use performative theories to enhance awareness of how the external environment influences what happens prior to the performance.

The conclusion reflects on how all of these preparation methods ultimately lead to assisting a preacher to communicate an inspired and truthful sermon more consistently.

Chapter 2

Preachers are a Piece of God's Artwork

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!

—*Hamlet* Act 2, Scene 2

“To love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength” and “to love one’s neighbor *as oneself*,”—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.

—Mark 12:33 NRSV

A person, who communicates with God, quickly comes to understand that God is continuously at work. The pastoral concept of “calling” is a never ending process. Each day brings a different *call to action*.

For most pastors, preaching is a calling that comes week after week. It is an *action* that must be *performed*. A pastor’s faith journey is never complete, so also his or her preaching journey is a continuous work in progress. When a preacher does not sharpen his or her skills then boring, bland, dull, uninspiring, untruthful, and unrealistic sermons are performed badly before a congregation.

Within performance training and methods, there are wide varieties of tools that can help a preacher create a process that generates better preaching, and enhance

constructive ministry. Clayton J. Schmit, a preaching professor, says “The habits of successful preachers are learned through the training of one’s mind, body, and voice.”¹

A piano player needs a piano to play. An actor and a preacher’s primary instruments are the mind, body, and voice. Charles Bartow, a retired preaching professor, says that a preacher who uses performance approaches, such as the voice and body, can find ways to tell reality truthfully and set people free in the best ways to live out the Word.²

The mind, the body, and the voice require preachers to know themselves in psychological, historical, physical, emotional, spiritual, and theological ways. To know one’s self is a difficult and never ending task. As Uta Hagen, a prominent acting teacher and performer in the 20th century, says about her life in the theater, “The learning process in art is never over. The possibilities of growth are limitless.”³ Self-evaluation is the first performance method that must be applied in the process of becoming a competent preacher, pastor, actor, speaker, and human. A preacher must know his or her instrument and all its parts to perform well.

Internal Preparation

“Who are *you*?” said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I--I hardly know, sir, just at present-- at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”⁴

¹ Clayton J. Schmit, “What Comes Next? Performing Music and Proclaiming the Word,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 181.

² Charles Bartow, “Performance Study in Service to the Spoken Word in Worship,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 217.

³ Uta Hagen and Haskel Frankel, *Respect for Acting*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), Kindle edition, under 112.

⁴ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Public Domain Books (Amazon Digital Services, 1997), Kindle edition, under 321.

The Caterpillar's question is a significant one. Hagen says that an actor must first know his or her identity. She says to her actors, "You must find your own sense of identity, enlarge this sense of self and learn that knowledge can be put to use in the characters you will portray on stage."⁵ This can also be true for characters people play in life: a mother, a daughter, a student, or a preacher. Richard F. Ward, a professor of preaching, defines humankind as *homo histrio*, or the concept that humans by nature are performers and sustain their identities through roles, rituals, and societal interaction skills.⁶ Each role in life is not just about identifying the role, but identifying how a person lives out that role to the best of his or her ability based on natural, and learned, responses. This requires taking time to begin self-discovery and honest evaluation of one's self and one's society.

Self-discovery can be a scary, risky, and uncomfortable process. It can also be fun, enlightening, and freeing. Internal self-discovery and physical awareness go hand in hand. Performance and spiritual practices can help make both internal and physical self-discoveries deep, meaningful, and positive occurrences. A person can begin at either a physical or an internal point with a variety of entry methods. The imperative part is to begin.

There are many excuses made by people, pastors included, for not doing self-discovery. Some fear that self-evaluations create vulnerability and weakness. Ward says preachers are afraid of being authentic because then people get too close.⁷ Hagen says

⁵ Hagen, 362-69.

⁶ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 76.

⁷ Richard F. Ward, "A Lively Word," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit, DVD (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

some actors are secretly afraid if they really examine themselves they will find they are boring and uninteresting.⁸

Unity Church pastor and activist, Marianne Williamson has a popular quote that argues the opposite fear. It says,

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.⁹

People who enter into self-discovery are not weak, selfish, or boring. For actors and preachers, self-evaluation can become self-revelation.¹⁰ Self-revelation leads to a person being able to communicate in more giving, authentic, heartfelt, faithful, and inspired ways. When a preacher is fully him or herself there is more access to creative avenues.

It is “slightly crazy” to be an actor or a preacher. It is crazy for a person to be willing to put him or herself in front of an audience or congregation and honestly acknowledge that his or her life is not neat, packaged, and predictable. Instead life may be terrifying, disgusting, and humiliating. It is *real* life and the speaker is a real person.¹¹ This fear of being authentic brings forth a sense of humility. Humility allows the *imago dei*, the God spark, to shine through someone, even in the hardships that are sometimes found in day to day life. God’s light can shine and be seen in imperfect and unpredictable

⁸ Hagen, 439-46.

⁹ Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1996), 190-91.

¹⁰ Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage, 1987), xix.

¹¹ Mamet, 89.

people living in an untidy world. For a pastor to pretend that he or she is perfect is just as unrealistic as pretending the world is perfect. Performance methods embrace the imperfections of humanity and the world. These methods focus on the individual in relationship to self, and outside of self, as an emotional and physical player.

A life really lived, as it should be by a pastor and an actor, is a full life. It is not a perfect life, but a meaningful one. Meaning comes from experiencing life. The more experiences the more depth and understandings are able to be realized. Life should be embraced and not feared. It is this fullness of the individual life in relation to the community existence that beckons the artistic parts of a preacher to engage. Viola Spolin, an improvisational theatre teacher, says, “The emotion we need for the theater can only come out of a fresh experience; for in such experiencing rests the stirring of our total selves – organic motion – which when combined with the theater reality spontaneously bring forth energy and motion for actors and audience alike.”¹² Fresh experiences are those that evoke from a person visceral and honest response. Often they are more current experiences in a person’s life because the more recent an event, the easier it is to recall the details and feelings. Sermons need this type of current and honest emotion in order to be vibrant, prophetic, and powerful communication.

Life, well lived, is not boring. This does not mean life must be extreme, but that one uses the five senses to appreciate life on a higher level than an average person. A preacher should strive for this higher level of awareness. A preacher should experience life in such a way that there is “too much” life to contain. Because there is so much to see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, life, God’s gift, must be shared and proclaimed. Just as

¹² Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*, 3rd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 219.

an artist must share the world as he or she knows it, the pastor must share life as he or she knows it. Preachers must know their community and their faith stories. They must be able to see how God is working in the world. Those who are in fear or unaware of themselves are not capable of self-giving. They cannot be credible transmitters of thoughts, feelings, ideas, and movement. They cannot be open enough to the excitement that comes from truly knowing God as a present working being. It is selfish of a pastor not to be willing to examine the depths of him or herself, find his or her voice, and maintain a body able to communicate the stories of the Christian faith.

Taking time to emotionally dig into one's self also requires that trust is built with others who can act as mirrors, confidants, and provide healthy positive feedback. Those who are called to the risky nature of performing as either actors or preachers may be prone to making unhealthy and risky choices. Hagen says, "A correctly functioning actor should, ideally, be the healthiest, least neurotic creature on earth, since he is putting his emotional and sensory life to use by expressing it for an artistic purpose."¹³ The emotional and mental health of a performer rests on a performer's ability to be vulnerable, open, relatable, and relational.

Throughout this paper, there will be suggestions of performance exercises and methods. There is no reason for a preacher to be overwhelmed by all the performance possibilities. Instead, there is a sense of great excitement because there are so many ways to be the instrument God intended. Just as all composers and painters do not compose and paint the same, preachers' sermons are not all the same. The basic tools are similar, (a pianist has a piano and a painter paints), but how a preacher uses his or her body, voice, and skills will determine the technique representative of that individual.

¹³ Hagen, 887.

Discipline

Discipline is needed by many preachers when it comes to their mental, emotional, and physical tool. Bella Merlin, an actor and professor, writes that the psycho-physical methods taught by the great acting teacher Constantine Stanislavsky in his later life teaches that training, of all types, takes a sense of discipline that can allow actors to listen to their instrument and its range of possibilities.¹⁴ The goal is to find what methods and practices work to make the preacher the most complete transmitter of the gospel story when performing and proclaiming the spoken Word to a congregation.

Performing methods have many forms of discipline to help with the mental, emotional, and physical preacher. These methods must be continuously practiced to reach full potential. Hagen uses an example that says, “A talented young pianist, skillful at improvisation or playing by ear, might be a temporary sensation in a night club or on television, but he knows better than to attempt a Beethoven piano concerto.”¹⁵ All preachers, as artists, must never rely on just their skills, but also their disciplined hard practice.

Presence and Authority

During high school, I attended a performing arts camp. One of the exercises was to enter the room, stand and then sit when the teacher said to sit. I had a similar experience in college. Each student was called up onto the stage, one by one, and we stood there, in silence, until the professor told us to sit down. *Presence* was the theatrical term used in these exercises. Did the student have presence when entering a room or a stage? Could the student actually stand comfortably and make a connection with others,

¹⁴ Merlin, 27.

¹⁵ Hagen, 119.

while having an inner sense of energy? Presence is a difficult concept to explain and teach. It comes from a performer's internal energy: a confidence, and a sense of worthiness within him or her. In preaching, the term most commonly used is *authority*. The process of self-discovery is a starting point for preachers to find their authority and thus begin to enable themselves with a sense of worth to preach.

Bad acting or preaching can come from time spent mimicking someone else and not finding one's own sense of authority. Imitating is an age old approach to rhetoric. According to Brestoff, during the 1700s, performer Aaron Hill focused on ten specific emotions and imitation of other actors and actors even copied paintings during that time to learn gestures for performance.¹⁶ It is important to watch, examine, and learn from talented speakers, but being someone else is never a truthful approach. The goal for a preacher and an actor is to be his or her best and not hide behind the mask of someone else's approach. A person cannot "act" like a preacher, he or she *is* the preacher whether he or she wants to be or not.

There are some pastors who love the role of preacher. For some pastors, the most natural impulse is to run the other direction when it is time to preach. These pastors have a difficult time finding the confidence in themselves to feel worthy to proclaim the stories of the Christian faith. This fear is understandable, but it should not overwhelm the person God has called to minister and lead the people.

All people have the potential to be good public speakers, and good public speakers have bad days too. Good public speakers are not engaging if they do not embody a truthful presence. Sometimes bad public speakers are more interesting to listen to if they have something passionate and emotional to express. Aristotle believed that

¹⁶ Brestoff, 4-15.

truthful speaking came from the *ethos* of the speaker and the audience's willingness to want to trust the speaker. The speaker had to believe he or she was worthy of speaking and had something worthy to say. With this belief comes presence.¹⁷

An actor, in acting teacher Stella Adler's view, must find life and go towards it because there is something larger that must be examined and shared. Adler even compared her calling with the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁸ She states that she always felt inside the need to do something bigger on stage and sought to find the tools to accomplish what the performing tasks demanded of her. Adler says, "Only you can be you." Imitating someone else is second best. The goal for a new preacher is not to be another preacher. The goal of a new preacher is to be him or herself to the best of his or her ability. Adler says about actors, "Your best isn't Barrymore's best or Olivier's best or my best, but your own . . . Olivier could stand on his head and still not be you. Only you can be you."¹⁹ Preachers need to be their best and being someone else makes them think they are second best.

Silence/Listening/Responding

"Silence," says Spolin, "creates openness between players and flow of evident energy, making it possible for them to reach into deeper personal resources."²⁰ True silence is difficult to find in many communities. How can people get in touch with themselves and the busy lives around them if they can't stop long enough to be silent? Alyce M. McKenzie, a preaching professor, says, "Preaching issues from deep silence,

¹⁷ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 65.

¹⁸ Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting*, ed. Howard Kissel, (New York: Applause Books, 2000), Kindle edition, under 2816.

¹⁹ Adler, 135-41.

²⁰ Spolin, 174-75.

the silence of God.”²¹ If a person cannot find time or ways to be silent then prayer life suffers, performances suffer, and God’s ability to communicate suffers when silence is lost in busy noise. When standing in front of people during the exercises in high school and college, it was the silence that I had to overcome internally. I thought speaking was my only form of communication. Instead I was learning that in those first few moments in front of an audience silence can build stronger trust and relationships than words. Silence allows me to look outside of myself and really see those in front of me. Silence allows me to listen to what is happening around me. Silence allows my imagination to listen for the spirit which Bartow says has ears that allows us to see God’s face.²² True silence is one of prayers most important aspects and one of preaching’s most critical tools. Preachers must trust themselves enough to use silence to communicate the stories of faith.

Listening well is another difficult action. A person who is not able to listen well is not able to accurately respond to anything. This includes a person’s ability to listen to him or herself. Hagen says that listening provides a performer the ability to find trigger objects that help connect to the inner emotions of a person in outward situations. Acting teacher Sanford Meisner has many techniques that enhance the skills of listening well so that a person responds honestly.²³

Honesty is a goal for actors and preachers. Honest responses can only be truthful if a person is really listening. Listening requires concentration. Strong concentration and

²¹ Alyce M. McKenzie, “At the Intersection of *Actio Divina* and *Homo Performans*: Embodiment and Evocation,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 66.

²² Charles Bartow, “Discovering One’s Voice,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers, and Clayton J. Schmit, DVD (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

²³ Meisner, 36.

listening moves a person from focusing inward to outward. A preacher can begin to find the right instincts to respond honestly with his or her own distinct and interesting natures. The emotional life inside a preacher will be focused on the sincerity of the actions outside.²⁴ Disciplining one's self to practice listening, just as a musician must practice scales, will help make listening well a natural and instinctual response.²⁵ Ward says, "The process of becoming a more credible speaker begins with looking and listening: to the deep interiorities of self, to the chorus of voices assembled in texts, and to the cries of the community."²⁶

Pastors who are conscious of themselves and their congregations are willing to discover the complexities of God's world will find it easier to express the Good News that is found in scripture and relate it to current life happenings week after week. Hagen says, "Customs, architecture, fashion, social needs, politics – all change, all come and go, but throughout history people have breathed, slept, eaten, loved, hated and had similar feelings emotions and needs."²⁷ A preacher may not be able to connect with a biblical story character until that character is made more relatable through the lens of our common human experiences, emotions and needs. There is a need for humans to connect with other human experiences and stories. This need for human connection allows people to engage in deeper relationships. For a preacher to connect to a congregation, he or she must be able to listen to the voices of the past so that today's Christians can be invited to respond faithfully.

²⁴John M. Rottman, "Performative Language and the Limits of Performance in Preaching," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 72.

²⁵ Meisner, 37.

²⁶ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 27.

²⁷ Hagen, 490.

Those who choose to minister in the role of pastor choose to listen and respond, and he or she must help a congregation do the same. Preaching is a response that is part of the pastor's role. Even if a pastor does not enjoy preaching, he or she has felt a pastoral call to respond. Response requires action. Action comes from physical and verbal movement. Thus, a person is a performer and a preacher by the very nature of the calling to pastor. A pastor has a calling to action that must be expressed or performed again and again in his or her life. Hagen says, "It is necessary to have a point of view about the world which surrounds you. . . . To portray things the way they are, to hold up a mirror to society . . . ask yourself, 'How can I bring all of this to the statement I wish to make in the theater?'"²⁸ A preacher must ask what statement needs to be made in the church. To do this, a person must be self-aware enough to know what is happening outside of him or herself. This is done through silence, listening, and responding.

Physical Preparation

Pastors are notorious for working too many hours and not attending to self-care. Stage performers cannot passionately perform eight shows a week on stage without being physically fit. Why do pastors think they can perform several sermons, house calls, business meetings, and more without the same physical fitness? Mental and emotional awareness go hand-in-hand with physical care. A pastor should be an example of good self-care. Jesus in his own ministry had moments where he spent time alone so that he could then go back out to the people. Giving takes energy.²⁹ One of the easiest signs of mental and emotional health is physical fitness. The physical body houses the instrument God has called the pastor to use.

²⁸ Hagen, 270.

²⁹ Adler, 219.

Preaching is physical act that employs visual and aural forms of communication. In order to have a healthy instrument for the preaching task a preacher must have more than cardio and strengthening needs. The body needs relaxation and good nutrition to be healthy. Pastors need to see working out, eating right, and relaxing as much a part of their job as prayer, research, meetings, and other pastoral tasks that are necessary to build good relationships. Whether a preacher takes time for a long walk, eats frozen yogurt instead of ice cream, or goes to sleep earlier each evening, each choice a preacher makes should be intentionally aware of the explicit effect it has on the physical instrument God has provided. A preacher needs to work with the physical gifts just as much as the mental and emotional gifts. Hagen says, “All parts of [the actor’s] instrument should be limber enough to respond to the psychological and emotional demands he may make on it when he springs into the physical and verbal action . . .”

Body

There are many physical exercises and nutritional options. Some acting methods are much more physical in nature than others. Just as there are different types of gym classes to fit different levels of interest, there are different acting methods which have a wide range of physical intensity. Acting teacher Tadashi Suzuki’s physical acting training, which is inspired by Eastern performance methods of Kabuki and Noh, is described as, “demanding, precise, and extremely technical, but paradoxically this allows the trainee greater freedom.” Suzuki’s method focuses on the feet and how the energy of the Earth is felt by a person through the feet.³⁰ This type of physical awareness and focus on one body part begins to allow a preacher to see how their entire body, not just the

³⁰ Tadashi Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, trans. by J. Thomas Rimer (New York: Theatre Communications, 1993), 12.

voice, is part of the preaching moment. For Suzuki's actors, the emotional work begins with the physical work.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, a Russian performer in the early 20th century, approached acting from a physical way. Instead of working from the inside out, he worked from the outside in. "He looked to the techniques of the Commedia del'arte, pantomime, the circus, and to Kabuki and Noh theaters of Japan for inspiration." He focused on the body's center of gravity, and the importance of the feet as the body part that is most grounding for an actor. In an industrial age, Meyerhold was trying to find the actor's "engine system." His technique was entitled *Biomechanics* and it was a complicated series of physical exercises.³¹ Physical awareness can ground a preacher in a way that creates a stronger presence and more impactful message.

Most seminaries do not teach preaching while focusing on the physical body. In academic structures it is the mental thought process that begins the preaching process. This is limiting for preachers. It limits them because just as some actors work from the internal to the external best, some preachers may work from the external to the internal best. When the focus is just on the words spoken and not *how* they are spoken, then the message cannot be communicated in its fullness clearly. A congregation must trust the speaker if they are going to be willing to invest in the speaker. The speaker, therefore, must present him or herself as physically trustworthy even before speaking. A person must be comfortable in his or her own body as a means of creating honest interaction with an audience.

Body language and voice tone contribute significantly more than words in communicating meaning. Professor of psychology, Albert Mehrabian says that when a

³¹ Brestoff, 71.

person speaks face-to-face, meaning is communicated 55% body, 38% tone of voice, and 7% actual words spoken.³² In the following chapter there will be more said about how the physical approach is part of a new hermeneutical movement to incorporate performative methods into preaching preparation. Preparing the actual words spoken is also necessary, but it is critical to observe that there is a lot riding on a pastor's physical care and health. Preachers need groundwork for the task of preaching physically. Pastor and trained mime, Todd Farley says, "Your body creates the space that allows a person to bring them [the audience] into the world. Words are cognitive . . . the body places those ideas on stage."³³ Physicality also includes vocal sounds.

Voice

A sermon, by its nature, is usually spoken. A preacher does not get up and "think" his or her sermon, but instead performs the sermon. A preacher who uses the voice primarily to communicate words wants to be vocally prepared when it is time to speak. Bartow says when it is time to accept the vocation of speaking the Word then it is time, "To put our lives at risk and our voice at risk and our selfhood at risk in the service of something larger than ourselves."³⁴

Performance tools can help a preacher find physical techniques that allow the voice to be used and understood in its greatest capacity. Jana Childers, a preaching professor, covers a lot of basic vocal tools in her book, *Performing the Word*. Her research led her to look at performing arts educator Leland Powers and his discoveries. Power's says there are three primary vocal communication styles that come from physical

³² Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 57.

³³ Todd Farley, "Embodying the Message," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit, DVD (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

³⁴ Bartow, "Discovering One's Voice," in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

associations. There are head, heart, and gut oriented speakers. One of these methods dominates an individual's style of vocal and physical communication; however, all three can be used to enhance the appropriate emphasis of what is being said. These three approaches are also present in scripture. A psalm can move from the heart to the gut as it laments God questions, or a letter can move from the heart to the head in its explanation. A preacher should analyze the type of approach being vocally used by the author of a text to understand the text.

The anatomy of the voice must be understood. The voice communicates with the teeth, tongue, lips, palate, jaw, diaphragm, lungs, throat, chest, larynx, and entire body in some way. There are three primary resonance chambers that create vibrations for the voice to be heard. They are referred to commonly as the head voice, the middle voice, and the chest voice.

There is a lot that can be learned from those who use vocal training in order to perform their jobs well. The voice has many ways it can orchestrate its sounds. The four basic components named by Childers are rate, pitch, volume and the use of pause.³⁵

Childers gives examples of some of the common problems with public speakers vocally. These include speakers who have a retracted voice that makes the voice sound swallowed. Some people overuse the nose resonance and sound nasal. There are some who have trouble with the placement of their tongue and teeth resulting in a lisp sound. Other people's voices fade off and the volume drops at the end of their sentences. Finally, there are those who are not relaxed and have glottal tension that creates a pinched

³⁵ Childers, 80-83.

sound.³⁶ Just like the body as a whole, these areas need to be relaxed and exercised to give the voice more freedom and flexibility.³⁷

During college I went to a speech therapist because my acting professors were concerned about a slight lisp I had developed when my jaw had been expanded during my teenage years. There were many exercises used to help me understand the anatomy of my mouth and how to train my tongue, teeth, and lips to work together to make it easier to understand the words I spoke from a distance. I still use the training from those sessions, combined with the vocal performance skills I learned in class.

Articulation is the production of consonants and enunciation is the production of vowels.³⁸ There were two vocal techniques I learned in college which help articulation and enunciation. They were the Arthur Lessac method and the Alexander technique.

Lessac taught basic vowel and consonant sounds. For example, when articulating in front of a group of people, it is important for unvoiced consonants like a “s” sound to be more voiced by using its voiced counterpart “z.” An example is the word “God’s” should sound like “God’z.” Another example is that when we tell someone to articulate he or she often adds an extra vowel sound. In attempting to articulate the “t” sound where the tongue moves from the top of the mouth quickly down, a person will say “ta” at the end of a word. From a distance one might hear “caught-ta” or even something like “cotton” instead of the word “caught.” These nuances are important to also note when a person speaks with accent or dialect.

There are some people who do not articulate and enunciate well and they would have to work much harder from what feels natural to what is most effective and will in

³⁶ Childers, 70-73.

³⁷ Childers, 63-65.

³⁸ Childers, 68.

time become natural. It does not matter how good a person's sermon is on paper if those in the congregation are not able to hear and understand what is said. Lessac says, "To the aware actor, vocal life is more than the extension of inner energies; it is a creative and controlling influence upon the dynamics of these energies."³⁹

The Alexander technique brings the anatomy of the entire body to allow actions, including vocal actions, to be performed with the greatest possible physical ease.

F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) was an Australian actor who began to experience chronic laryngitis whenever he performed. When his doctors could not help him, Alexander discovered a solution on his own. He had not been aware that excess tension in his neck and body were causing his problems, and began to find new ways to speak and move with greater ease.⁴⁰

Many people have a lot of tension in their body. This affects their physical, mental, emotional, and vocal health. Brestoff says, "It [tension] pinches the voice, stiffens the muscles, shortens the breath and blocks the mind."⁴¹ The Alexander technique helps a person release this tension. (If that does not seem to work for a pastor, encourage his or her congregation to invest in a good massage therapist or heating pad.) Just as meditation and prayer are significant to overall spiritual health, relaxation and good breathing skills are important in the preparation and vocal communication of good sermons.

Breathing deeply and with intention helps support the voice and the images found in the "music of the words" spoken.⁴² Breathing is part of relaxation. Acting teacher Robert Lewis said relaxation allows emotion and thinking to come through while a performer uses his or her energy in more productive ways.⁴³ The simple act of taking a

³⁹ Arthur Lessac, *The Use and Training of the Human Voice: A Bio-Dynamic Approach to Vocal Life*, 3rd ed. (Mountain View, CA.: McGraw-Hill/Mayfield, 1997), 9.

⁴⁰ Robert Rickover, "Who Was Frederick Matthias Alexander?" *The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique*, <http://www.alexandertechnique.com/fma.htm> (accessed November 16, 2011).

⁴¹ Brestoff, 29.

⁴² Bartow, "Discovering One's Voice," in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

⁴³ Lewis, 5.

deep breath or touching a pew can help ground and release some unwanted tension. A moment of silence, while it should not be overused, is a vocal gesture that can help center a preacher back to where what is being said vocally and the body are in coherence.⁴⁴

Before entering the pulpit, a pastor needs to take time to be silent, breathe, relax, and connect with the divine breath physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Summary

The body should be prepared by the preacher in a way that allows him or her to be ready to spring into the action and share the message God is calling him or her to convey at any moment. Childers says, “A good actor aims to create of her body a sensitive instrument, an instrument that is ready to respond to the smallest signal and that is unimpeded by the clutter of nervous or idiosyncratic gestures.”⁴⁵ Adler says that actors must be prepared to deal with great questions by being prepared to awaken their souls and find the energy that allows other to understand the greatness of what is being communicated.⁴⁶ Preachers who treat their emotional, mental, and physical needs casually impede themselves from being able to express faithfully.⁴⁷

The preaching of the gospel message is not a casual experience. It requires people who are willing to be transparent and possess the traits of servanthood, diligence, authenticity, and humility.⁴⁸ Preaching requires a person to have the best instrument and tools available to communicate well. To possess these characteristics there is a lot of work that a preacher must do on him or herself to be able to listen and respond to the overwhelming and wonderful calling of preacher, teacher, and pastor.

⁴⁴ Bartow, “Discovering One’s Voice,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

⁴⁵ Childers, 115.

⁴⁶ Adler. 260, 279.

⁴⁷ Childers, 115.

⁴⁸ Clayton J. Schmit, *Too Deep for Words* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 68.

Chapter 3

God's Script is a Pretty Good One, Start and Go from There

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
–Hamlet Act 3, Scene 3

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
 was with God, and the Word was God.
–John 1:1 NRSV

A preacher gets to be the performer *and* the playwright of the sermon. The script from which he or she creates the sermon is the Bible. There are other written, musical, and artistic resources that can be part of the creative and the hermeneutical process as a preacher prepares a sermon. As discussed in the first chapter, the body is the instrument that works to convey truthful meaning, but the rhetoric must be faithful to the biblical or thematic forms.¹

Words are important. Standing in front of a congregation in silence is not what a preacher is called to do by the congregation. The language between theatre and worship is already used interchangeably. Childers points out that both preachers and actors use terms like “picking up cues” and “lost my rhythm.” There are also theological terms that are used in the theatrical world. Both theatre and worship strive to experience spirit-filled communion together.² Preaching, however, has not claimed theatrical terms in a decisive

¹ McKenzie, 54.

² Childers, 22.

way. Childers says, “Preaching needs a language and a method that will take the full measure of its liveliness.”³ It seems only natural that this language should come from theatre.

Historically, the words used for all forms of public performance and speaking were studied simultaneously and had areas where they overlapped. Aristotle is known for his philosophical insights on many topics during the 4th century B.C.E. For Aristotle rhetoric, which is the term that best parallels the current concept of preaching, is “the faculty of observing in any given case the means to persuasion.”⁴ Aristotle argued that rhetoric “depends on the personal character of the speaker.”⁵ The speaker must be credible enough to put the audience that is listening in the correct frame of mind that will allow the proof to be considered true. For him or her to be effective, a speaker must be able to “(1) to reason logically, (2) understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions-that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the ways in which they are excited.”⁶ The elements in the speech, for Aristotle, include *invention* (discovery of potential arguments to use), *arrangement* (the order in which one developed one’s argument), *style* (the way the speaker uses words), *memory* and *delivery*.⁷ Good performance for Aristotle came from those who mimicked beautiful actions. Mimicking for him was not something unnatural, but instead a way of observing the world, just as a small child mimics adult behaviors.⁸ These behaviors are actions that move the plot forward.⁹ Aristotle, long ago, knew that

³ Childers, 21.

⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (ReadaClassic.com, 2010), 7.

⁵ Aristotle, 8.

⁶ Aristotle, 8.

⁷ McKenzie, 55.

⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing/R. Pullins, 2006), 23.

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 19.

the physical, emotional, mental awareness of a speaker effected how a person's message was heard. Historically, he is not alone in recognizing the overlap that comes from performance and public speaking. Augustine and Cicero both divided the style of a speech into three sections; to teach, to delight/give pleasure, and to persuade/move.¹⁰ Aquinas saw God as a pure act, and preachers are the ones continuing that action.¹¹ These same concepts are found in Stanislavsky's performative language from the early 20th century, and then expanded upon by other acting teachers. Stanislavsky's method can be a base language for preachers to work with or against as they prepare their sermons, just as it is for actors.

These two artistic areas, preaching and acting, are once again starting to work with each other and not against one another. Since the turn of the 20th century religious organizations have created workshops, councils, and groups that have merged theatre with worship in an effort to revitalize worship.¹² Preaching and acting historically come from the same basic response to answer deep human questions.¹³ It makes sense that the language and skill set used for the performer can be applied to the exegetical study of scripture.

Homiletic Approaches to Scripture

First, it is necessary to examine the basic history of homiletic teaching. Preaching has always been a part of the transmission of faith, but it has not always looked like it does today. Verbal transmission was the way that biblical information was shared long before faithful words were written down. Even once stories and letters were written down

¹⁰ Childers, 27-32.

¹¹ Childers, 41-42.

¹² Childers, 11.

¹³ Rottman, 77.

most people did not have access to the written word. It was not until the printing press became a part of society that the Bible began to become the written word and not the spoken word. Once the Bible was something most people had access to, it became essential for people to study and understand what they were reading.

The academic study of scripture developed exegetical and hermeneutical approaches. The traditional methods of biblical criticism include the following: *Literary Criticism* which is the study of images, symbols, word meanings, characters, and character relations; *textual criticism* which is the study of various manuscripts, word spellings, and intentional/unintentional changes; *source criticism* which is the study of other sources that would have influence the scripture; *form criticism* which is the study of the literary form or genre; *redaction criticism* which is the study of the author as also an editor who used different textual, oral and life sources to influence the shaping of the text; and *socio-historical criticism* which is the study of the social historical, and cultural information for all aspects of life in which the scripture was written. Along with these basic approaches are new approaches that incorporate examining tradition, science, and contextual aspects of scripture.¹⁴ By hermeneutics, we are referring to the rules that preside over an exegesis. Attention to hermeneutics and the exegetical process enable the preacher to come to some understanding of Scripture. The search for this meaning or truth is the same goal which actors are trying to achieve in a play.

John Rottman, a professor of preaching explains that preaching of the centuries have reflected particular periods or influences of the enlightenment or scientific era. German theologians Karl Barth, Ernst Fuch and Gerhard Ebeling are credited with with

¹⁴ Felix Just, "Biblical Exegesis: An Introductory Overview," Electronic New Testament Educational Resources, <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Exegesis.htm> (accessed October 21, 2011).

advancing the New Hermeneutic as a method in the field of Homiletics.¹⁵ From this development came the current movement named the New Homiletic. Scott M. Gibson says, “David James Randolph coined the term *New Homiletic* and formalized the teachings of Ebeling and Fuchs in his 1969 landmark book *The Renewal of Preaching*.”¹⁶

The New Homiletic has three aspects that go hand in hand with performative methods and language. The New Homiletic sees preaching and worship as *dialogical*. It also emphasizes the importance of the *emotional* investment of the preacher in both preparation and delivery, and finally, the *imagination* has a far more profound role that can deepen the stories and images used to illustrate the sermon.¹⁷ The goal of the New Homiletic is to find ways for people to know that the Bible still speaks to them in today’s society. Gibson says,

The central concern is (for the New Homiletic) not what a sermon *is*, but what a sermon *does*. There is a shift from traditional homiletics based on determining the original meaning of the text, to the sermon as a speech-event that discloses its meaning through its relationship to its context, to the faith, and to the listener and community. The sermon is seen as an event or experience.¹⁸

Some of the leaders in this movement are Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Eugene Lowry, Charles Rice, Edmund Steimle, Morris Niedenthal, Richard Jensen, Lucy Rose, Thomas Troeger, and Henry Mitchell.¹⁹

Pastors spend hours studying scripture. Many times this study of scripture is silent. Preachers are examining what the scripture “is,” and forget to focus on what is “does.” Leading homiletic teachers are starting to encourage preachers to include

¹⁵ Rottman, 73.

¹⁶ Scott M. Gibson, “Critique of the New Homiletic,” <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/skills/2005/august/129--gibson.html?start=1> (accessed October 20, 2011).

¹⁷ McKenzie, 58.

¹⁸ Gibson.

¹⁹ Gibson.

speaking out loud as part of their preparation. This is part of the hermeneutical process because when a person speaks, he or she is participating in an act that “seeks to do things, to have certain effects on its audience, and not just to say things.” In the previous statement, McKenzie is implying that all oral communication has a performative element since much of scripture was first passed down through storytelling. It is important for a preacher to not only know what the text says but how it was spoken. A preacher should examine a text and its history both silently and verbally.²⁰

There are many methods for preaching, just as there are methods for acting. Many of the newer methods use theatrical elements and terms in their preparation. Eugene Lowry and Fred Craddock use the concept of *discoveries*. Thomas H. Troeger and Paul Scott Wilson use the *imagination*. David Buttrick uses the theatrical tools found in theatrical group work. African American preaching has always had a theatrical storytelling art to it.²¹ Many leading homiletic preachers are teaching similar concepts in their classrooms, but using different terms as they teach. Performance methods have a similar foundational language.

Because of Stanislavsky, theatre artists have a common language with which to work that allows a performer to prepare using tools that provide a way to access a deeper set of emotional, mental, and physical abilities. Preaching methods do not have a common language, and therefore should embrace openly the language used by the theatre to achieve the goals set forth by the New Homiletic of being dialogical, emotional, and imaginative. If plays and good sermons are filled with stories, then the same tools should be useful for both.

²⁰ McKenzie, 61.

²¹ Ronald J. Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998), 177-205.

Performance Approaches to the Play

Stanislavsky created the method that most acting teachers and students first learn. Whether or not they agree or disagree with his technique is something an actor determines throughout his or her study. What Stanislavsky did was to combine hundreds of years of performance understanding and create a common language that is used as a foundation for all acting. Preachers have not yet found that language. Instead there are so many methods for a preacher to learn, that it is difficult in seminary to discover the methods and teachers which may have the tools to help that individual pastor find his or her best preaching voice.

Current hermeneutical study is focused on the written word. The basic parts of composing an exegesis paper consist of spending time in a library. This same type of research overlaps with the preparation method of preachers, but actors have more steps than just using the thinking process to connect to a text. Actors use their minds and their bodies to build a foundation that will help communicate best with those listening. Actors do not just read the text, but they try to find ways to really experience the text in a way that will allow the audience to have an inspirational experience. Stanislavsky found terms to help describe this inward and outward process. Stanislavsky, however, never promised that his ‘system’ would guarantee inspiration.” He was just looking for some tools to help create a place for inspiration to occur. Brestoff points out that any method is “simply a means, not an end,” that is trying to create “a mutual and beautiful communal act of the imagination.”²²

Many of the tools in acting parallel the tools in creating a good exegetical study of scripture. Stanislavsky suggests that an actor study “the external plane,” which is the

²² Brestoff, 58.

dramatic structure of a script. It looks at its events, plot devices, rhythm, and forms. “The plane of the social situation” is the study of historical settings and the given (explicit) circumstances. “The literary plane” is the study of a writer’s language and style. “The aesthetic plane” is the study of a script’s theatrical devices which may help to understand the relationship the author has with the audience “The psychological plane” is the study of the characters that make up the story. “The physical plane” is the study of the actions taken by those in the story. Finally, an actor or a preacher must bring him or herself into this process by examining his or her “plane of personal creative feelings.”

Looking at the history, traditions, rhetoric, language, society, audience, and so forth of scripture is what helps create the foundation of a good exegetically sound sermon. These terms by Stanislavsky work hand in hand with hermeneutical approaches, thus showing the similarities, once again, between homiletic and performative academic applications. The list below does not parallel exactly, but there are clear overlaps between the intellectual approaches for both acting and preaching.

Acting Performance and Homiletic/Hermeneutical Study: Language Comparison

| <i>Acting Performance (Stanislavsky)²³</i> | <i>Homiletic/Hermeneutical²⁴</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>The External Plane</u> : study of the dramatic structure of a script. It examines its events, plot device, rhythm, and form. | <u>Literary Criticism</u> : study of images, symbols, word meanings, characters, and character relations. |
| <u>The Psychological Plane</u> : study of the characters that make up the story. | |
| <u>The Literary Plane</u> : study of the writer’s language and style. | <u>Textual Criticism</u> : study of various manuscripts, word spellings, and intentional/unintentional changes. |
| <u>The Plane of the Social Situation</u> : study of the historical setting. | <u>Source Criticism</u> : study of other sources that would influence the scripture. <u>Socio-Historical Criticism</u> : study of social, historical, and culture information in which the scripture was written. |

²³ Merlin. 61-66.

²⁴ Just, “Biblical Exegesis: An Introductory Overview.”

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>The Physical Plane:</u> study of the actions taken by those in the story. | <u>Form Criticism:</u> study of the literary form or genre. |
| <u>The Plane of Personal Creative Feeling:</u> study of the performer examining his or her role in the process. | <u>Redaction Criticism:</u> study of the author as also an editor. |

What is above is only one aspect of Stanislavsky's approach to performance preparation. Stanislavsky wanted to seek ways to connect to the physical and psychological.²⁵ To examine Stanislavsky's work more directly, the two books written by Stanislavsky on performance methods are *An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on a Role*. After these books were written there continued to be ongoing discussion among actors about what changed in Stanislavsky's theories in his later life. Instead of looking at his direct works, it is easier to establish Stanislavsky's basic method approaches from those who have looked back on his entire life. It is the language of his method, and those influenced by it that can be used to help preachers find performative ways to move towards generating a more engaging sermon.

Below is a list of terms and general definitions and examples associated with Stanislavsky's method.

Relaxation: If someone is told to relax, that person quickly tenses up. Relaxation is one of the toughest reactions for a person to accomplish. Brestoff says, "When you are totally tense, you cannot move, speak, or think."²⁶ One of the first ways to help a person relax is to focus on breathing exercises.

Concentration: Concentration is an action. It is not a frozen response, but requires a mind that is alive and active. Brestoff says, "We are assessing, judging, weighing, and reacting to the object of our attention." There are different levels of concentration and attentiveness. Concentration can begin with a person having attention on something very small and then expanding that circle to something larger.²⁷

²⁵ Brestoff, 22.

²⁶ Brestoff, 29.

²⁷ Merlin, 279.

Imagination: The imagination is the *inner creative state*. It is the place where inspiration and spirit reside.²⁸

Given Circumstances: The imagination is activated by the details found in the text. This includes the character facts, play facts, events, epoch, time, and place of action.²⁹

Magic "If: " The details not found in the text use the magic "if." The question asked is what would the character do *if* . . . ? The answers to this question are best chosen when a person is observant of the *given circumstances* and is able to respond intuitively.

Action: Action is the process when a performer breathes life into the words based on the previous information gathered.³⁰ Actions occur by overcoming *obstacles* in different sections, or *beats*, with various tactics.³¹

Sensory Recall: This is one of the most debated aspects of Stanislavsky's Method. It calls upon the five senses to recall a previous experience and make it fresh. Some acting teachers have taken this tactic to the extreme when asking performers to recall traumatic experiences in their life as if they were currently happening again.

All of these terms go hand in hand with one another to create a flow between what Stanislavsky called a performer's *inner* and *outer life*. To breathe is to take in life. To take in life is a way to concentrate and to open the imagination. Once the imagination is open, a preacher can access the "magic ifs" and move into actions that are sensory responses to what has happened before and what is currently happening.

From this foundation all other acting teaching has worked with or against what was set forth by Stanislavsky. With this foundation a preacher can begin to find the best performance tools that work for him or her to find *theological truth*. Truth is the ultimate goal for all who stand in front of an audience.

²⁸ Merlin, 47.

²⁹ Merlin, 66.

³⁰ Merlin, 60.

³¹ Examples in Chapter 4.

How Performance and Exegetical Methods Can Work Together

Preachers must begin to reclaim theatrical terms and teach that good performing is not the same as the negative image that people like Marguerite Shuster express. Shuster says, “And those of us who retain a view of preaching as, properly, a holy mystery not in any human being’s full control can only cringe at every tendency to turn the service of Christian worship into theater, with its leader a well-tooled actor.”³² Those who agree with Shuster do not understand the actual nature of good theatre and performance. Good actors, in fact, do the opposite of Shuster’s critique. “Well-tooled actors” prepare themselves so that when it comes time to perform they are able to be physically, mentally, and emotionally open to respond honestly and truthfully to what is not, nor should be, in their control onstage. Good actors, like good preachers, are prepared to let the “holy mystery” in because they have prepared to recognize its presence.

The naysayers, like Shuster, are responding to what Childers’ calls “kitsch” and “propaganda” that create untruthful, inaccurate, and unfaithful responses to the world.³³ They are not responding to what good actors are actually taught. Ward writes that performance terms have been turned into negative catch phrases, such as “melodramatic,” “theatrical,” and “stagey.”³⁴ These expressions, however, do not represent the real definition and work ethic behind theatrical performance. Instead, preachers need to learn that by embracing the language of performance they can create a three-dimensional event that allows scripture to really come off the page.³⁵ Ward says, “Performance studies’ legacy of creating, evaluating, and doing performances is a resource for homiletics,

³² Marguerite Shuster, “The Truth and Truthfulness,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 20.

³³ Childers, 39.

³⁴ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 76.

³⁵ Ward, “A Lively Word,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

because it addresses this problem of integrating language, sound, and movement in an oral, interpretive act of human communication.”³⁶ Performance words offer the language that preaching has been drawn to use. The words set forth by Stanislavsky and those teachers who have built off of his foundation are a language that can be valued as an important theological tool. Childers says, “It might be said that the only language up to the task of elucidating artistic processes is theological language, because such processes are ultimately creative, that is, life giving.”³⁷

Ward has already created a term in which performance vocabulary and teachings are used as an exegetical response. He calls the process of applying performance studies to scripture as *narrative exegesis*. Narrative exegesis studies the transaction between author, text, and reader. It evaluates the performance aspects that are a part of the history of the text and what the text is saying by how the text is saying it. Bartow uses another term call *vocal exegesis*. This type of research includes hermeneutical research into how the biblical or thematic text was first performed and received. This includes analyzing how the text would be heard by a congregation today. Even if the text is a letter, many ancient letters were meant to be read out loud.³⁸

Read Out Loud

When reviewing the history of homiletics and scripture, hermeneutical study was not done in a library, but was orally shared. It makes sense, then, that to really understand scripture and prepare a sermon a pastor must be willing to use performance methods.

³⁶ Richard F. Ward, *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 7.

³⁷ Childers, 24.

³⁸ Ronald J. Allen, “Performance and the New Testament in Preaching,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 107.

When a preacher approaches a text for the first time, he or she uses the common forms of textual exegetical criticism. None of these approaches have anything to do with presentation or performance. Professor of preaching, Ronald J. Allen says, “By integrating performance into all aspects of sermon preparation, the preacher can move toward overcoming the hiatus between print-based preparation and oral-aural embodiment of the pulpit.”³⁹ The most basic method is reading out loud both scripture and the written sermon multiple times.

To really understand scripture, a person must read it out loud. Ward says, “An oral/aural experience of biblical texts urges a different sort of participation in the life of the text than does a silent reading.”⁴⁰ A preacher has to go over the words again and again, express the voice of the author, and incorporate that voice into his or her own. When combining this one basic step with the other hermeneutical forms, a pastor can begin to make a personal connection with the scripture and embody its theology in a way that can be applied to the sermon. Merlin says a person should not underestimate his or her first impression of a text and make sure to be in a good place to really be open to the text for the first time as he or she reads out loud.

Reading the scripture and sermon out loud helps a preacher claim the texts in a personal way. Reading out loud can connect the voices of the past with the voices in today’s world. Hagen says about performing historical plays,

For some strange reason, we believe that anyone who lived before we were born was in some peculiar way a different kind of human being from any we have come in contact with in our own lifetime. This concept must be changed; we must realize in our bones that almost everything in time and history has change except the human being . . . And when we choose, or are called on, to play a character

³⁹ Allen, “Performance and the New Testament in Preaching,” 116.

⁴⁰ Ward, *Speaking of the Holy*, 74.

living in a time that precedes our own birthday, we must still find the human being and not the cardboard cliché.⁴¹

A preacher must embody and experience the words on the page and connect to them on a human level that overcomes the distance of time.

It is the words as an oral event that can begin to bring connection to scripture in a way that academic research is not able. Hagen says that when working with a text, the points of view of both the performer and the author can work together to create new life.⁴² The simple act of speaking out loud begins to give the words a sense of movement. The words can begin to come alive. Actions can begin to be defined from the point of view of the speaker and the author.

It is at the point in the narrative or vocal exegesis process where Stanislavsky's language, used by most actors, becomes applicable on multiple levels to preparing the sermon. It is at this point that the preacher must bring what is written in scripture to life in today's church. The imagination creates sermon performances worthy of the theological complex biblical stories. Allen says, "Participating imaginatively in stories prompts listeners to imagine consciously and/or intuitively how more faithfully they could perform their lives in their own worlds as informed by the performance of the gospel narrative."⁴³

Beatitudes are performed differently than commissioning stories, call narratives are distinctively unlike holy laws, and so forth. These differences make each biblical story unique, distinctive, and compelling, just as each preacher and audience member brings something unique, distinctive and compelling to the worship encounter. The

⁴¹ Hagen, 490.

⁴² Hagen, 2041.

⁴³ Allen, "Performance and the New Testament in Preaching," 112.

sermon is part of worship, and worship works to make meaning, interpret, and understand how God worked in the past, moves in the present, and fulfills promises in the future. It is not a silent, read alone experience, but a communal occurrence in which the cast includes God, the pastor, the historical author, the historical audience, the historical interpreters, and the current congregation.

Be Attentive

The exegetical study informs the preacher. Adler says an actor's job is to "experience and interpret" the ideas of the playwright. Preachers also have the responsibility to respect the "playwrights" of the Bible.⁴⁴ This requires awareness of history, nature, books, paintings, music, and of every living moment.

Actors and preachers must carry the learning process into daily life. A pastor must examine life in all its forms around him or her. Early 20th century Russian Actor, Michael Chekov, thought that for an actor to only use their own life experiences would quickly exhaust their emotional resources. It is here that the idea of carefully observing people, objects, and life (along with a vivid imagination) starts to become a significant preaching tool.⁴⁵

Acting is not just a job at a theatre but a way of life. An actor is constantly preparing by observing each moment. An actor is not imitating behavior but capturing the essence of behaviors found in life in a precise manner.⁴⁶ Pastors should be doing this same type of life study each day. A call to ministry is a way of life. Ministers are actively participating in the lives of other people. Just as good acting comes from strong relationships, good ministry comes from the same concept. Actors study life based on the

⁴⁴ Hagen, 1904, 1167.

⁴⁵ Brestoff, 63.

⁴⁶ Adler, 538.

directions given in a play. Pastors study life based on the instructions given by their faith practices. For both to perform well, information must be gathered mentally, emotionally, and physically. Ward says, “Preaching is collaboration between human and divine. Both must be studied in multiple ways.”⁴⁷

The study of homiletics, as discussed earlier, has changed. The study of hermeneutics has broadened as people’s understanding of their faith has changed. Preaching has had to change with these views. Preachers have had to reexamine their style of speaking. They must recognize the variety of genres in preaching, and the multi-leveled relationships with a congregation, the world, and one’s self.⁴⁸ It is a daunting and electrifying pursuit to perform God’s word in profound and prophetic ways. Acting methods provide invaluable resources for the preacher who is striving to achieve an inspirational message week after week. Acting provides a language base which has been missing in preaching classrooms and several concepts of exegetical approaches which find ways to make scripture real, relatable, and revelatory.

Playing in Preparation for Preaching

Maybe as Shakespeare suggested in his play *As You Like It*, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” Shakespeare’s audience would have understood the religious significance of the seven stages of life explained by the character of Jaques in his soliloquy found in Act II, scene VII. The audience would have been mostly Protestants or Catholics and seen God as the one casting each person in certain

⁴⁷ Richard F. Ward, “Finding Voice in the Theological School,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 142.

⁴⁸ McKenzie, 53-66.

roles at different times to see how each one plays out his or her part.⁴⁹ If that is still true today, I wonder if the play upon God's stage is any good. Are people playing their parts well or are some people boring? Do people today think God is boring and not playful?

There is a reason that it is called a play. Even tragedies are to be approached in playful ways. An actor cannot "play" tragic. There are actions and consequences which lead to a tragic event and response. An actor *plays* actions. Lots of actions create a theatrical experience. There are physical, mental, and emotional ways for a person to *play* so as to express life through a sermon on a divine stage.

Before putting actions to scripted texts, a performer should brainstorm a sermon by accessing mental, emotional, and physical responses. The actor must use his or her sensory equipment to really experience and study day to day activities. An actor and preacher must recognize that "the world provides the material for the theater (and church), and artistic growth develops hand-in-hand with one's recognition of it and one's self within it."⁵⁰

Preparation should be a playful process. If a person is not intensely engaged in joyful or significant ways then a congregation will not be engaged. A congregation cannot truly celebrate the Good News of scripture if the preacher is not able to really celebrate joyfully. A congregation cannot have a sense of significance in a sermon, if a preacher is not invested into the topic. Even though performance is a disciplined process, it is a creative, inspirational, and joyful experience.

Even though the preparation process should be playful, it does not necessarily need to be entertaining. This is the rehearsal process. It is the time when a pianist would

⁴⁹William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Kindle edition, Public Domain Books (Amazon Digital Services, 1998).

⁵⁰ Spolin, 16.

practice scales to perfect his or her instinct. Meisner says, “Of course, if I were a pianist and sat for an hour making each finer move in a certain way, the onlooker could very well say, ‘That’s boring!’ And it would – to the onlooker. But the practitioner is somebody who is learning to funnel his instincts, not give performances.”⁵¹

There are a multitude of acting exercises that can enrich a preacher’s way of learning to play and ultimately enrich a preacher’s ability to perform. Finding paintings, listening to music, and reading poetry are just examples of a ways to approach a scriptural passage. These examples of mental preparation can be a fun aspect of the hermeneutical process, just as it is for the acting process.

There is another level, however, that can provide valid ways of not just mental, but physical and emotional ways to play with a topic. If there is a painting that speaks to a preacher about the text, he or she should take time to write a story based on that painting. If there is a word from the text that stands out to a pastor, he or she should say the word in funny accents and at different sound levels and lengths. If a preacher is preparing a sermon on Eve eating the fruit in Genesis 3:6, it may be fun to eat different fruits and describe their tastes. By taking time to experience the scripture with the five senses the presence and emotional quality of the final sermon will be enriched. Hagen says, “Everything you explore should eventually lead you to real walking, talking, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and feeling!”⁵²

This process of creatively approaching scripture and the sermon writing process can help a person create impulses that cohere with the direction the spirit is moving him or her to go. It opens a sermon to be something that is multifaceted. A preacher focuses

⁵¹ Meisner, 37.

⁵² Hagen, 1941.

on outward resources to stimulate inward responses that can then be projected back out again to a congregation. It is this pattern that opens doors for the spirit to enter in and move back out. A pastor listens with a heightened physical sense of awareness and then is able to respond on a deeper level more honestly because he or she has personally interacted with the texts.

Practical Performance Preparation for Preaching

The reality is that there are some people who are more self-aware than others, and there are some people who have better impulses for public speaking. There are people whose idiosyncrasies can make them endearing or can make them annoying. As creative as the performance methods can be, there are also some practical elements to help a person who may need to become aware of some of the basic components in public speaking.

Most good homiletics courses do cover some basic rhetorical skills. The deeper level of communication provided by performative methods cannot be easily achieved until the basics of good public speaking become habits. Schmit says the sermon needs to include well-crafted language because its purpose is to “disclose the Divine Presence and proclaim God’s promise, it needs to speak with clarity and depth.” Here are the basic rhetoric 101 skill assessments. Unitarian Universalist pastors, Jane Rzepka and Ken Sawyer say, “Focusing on such practical concerns as posture, breathing, enunciation, inflection, and even facial expressions,” helps develop good speaking skills.⁵³

- A preacher must be loud enough to be heard. This includes a preacher having a good tone, resonance, and variety in pitch and rhythm.

⁵³ Jane Rzepka and Tom Sawyer, *Thematic Preaching: An Introduction* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 88.

- A preacher needs the words to be spoken slowly and clearly. This includes a preacher being able to have enough breath support. Words should not be dropped at the end of sentences or thoughts.
- A preacher needs to write and present for the listener, not the reader. A preacher must talk out to the congregation and not just read the sermon. Emphasis on words and thoughts should vary. Adler encourages actors to not use fancy words, but to find words that connect and build relationships.⁵⁴
- A preacher should know to stand up straight and look out into the congregation.

Confidence in public speaking is a catch-22. A person becomes confident in public speaking by doing it, but must first obtain confidence to speak. (Maybe that is why so many people fear speaking in front of others.) The first baby step a person can take when standing in front of others is imitation. It is natural for people to imitate what they have experienced before. For a preacher to imitate other good preachers is not a bad first step. It is, however, a limiting step. A preacher cannot be fully present in the moment of preaching if he or she is trying to be someone else. There are many voices involved in the creation of a sermon. Performing another voice limits the natural flow of inward and outward impulses.

Day to day interaction in society may not teach good emphasis in speaking or mannerisms.⁵⁵ For a performer to intentionally imitate or reflect society, he or she must be aware of the skills needed to express appropriate gestures at the correct place and time. A gesture should make sense in the moment. A gesture is a crucial communication tool that should stem from the entire body. French musician and teacher, Francois Delsarte explains why imitation is a short path. He says, “Nothing is more deplorable than a

⁵⁴ Adler, 1324.

⁵⁵ Bartow, “Discovering One’s Voice,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

gesture without a motive.”⁵⁶ The body should be in what Farley calls at *double zero* or “blank canvas” state that allows gesture, facial movement, and words to be painted upon. There are three areas where a preacher’s zero is established: posture, rhythm, and gesture. Each person has a different zero point in his or her day to day life. Some people are very active at their zero point and others are still. A preacher must realize his or her zero point so he or she can begin to build better skills in physical communication.

To begin to build skills, Farley goes through each body part to explain the symbolism and responses to that body part.

Head: “The head is generally understood as a gestural signifier for life, leadership, intelligence, and intellectual direction.”

Face: “The face is the most communicative part of the body, and also the first to lie.”

Neck: “The neck can communicate pride, self-confidence, and stubbornness when stiffened; but when exposed, it is associated with vulnerability.”

Chest: “The chest represents the visual breath—life. And because of the Western symbolism of the heart, it also represents love and emotions.”

Waist: “The waist is the center of the body, the symbolic seat of the soul, appetites, and desires.”

Pelvis: “The pelvis is the foundation on which the upper body sits. It is also a symbol for gender and humanity.”

Arms: “The arms represent the ability to work and achieve tasks.”

Hands: “The hands are the second most communicative part of the body. Many times they are also the least controlled. . . . Hand gestures have three common elements hand position, hand/body design, and rhythm.”

Legs: The legs are primarily used to communicate concepts of direction, transportation, possession, and dominion.”

Feet: “The feet are the foundation of the body and communicate the domain of a person. The feet have long been a symbol of ownership and possession, for only one person can stand in the occupied space.”

Back: “The back communicates vulnerability, rejection, refusal, and burden when turned away, or conversely, resolve, strength, and decisiveness when straightened.”

⁵⁶ Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1886), 40.

Shoulders: “The shoulders are the symbol for the bearing of burdens and stress.”⁵⁷

The body should be able to be in a relaxed state and then only use tension for vocal, facial, and physical gesture when a performer’s impulses have playfully discovered an instinctive and appropriate response in the given moment. The appropriate responses come when a pastor is physically aware of his or her areas of tension, idiosyncrasies, vocal problems, and so forth.

A preacher can seek out performance exercises based on his or her area of need to help free what has been inhibited or incorrectly used. These exercises will be something a preacher can constantly practice to help create appropriate responses that come from taught kinesthetic and visual memory. Some people need a speech therapist, sleep, or more exercise. Once again the goal is to make sure the entire preaching instrument, provided by God, is tuned correctly and ready to be played well. The preacher is now a receptive and poised instrument.

Now Add Words?

To grow into the voice God wants a preacher to have, I suggest starting to write *without* words.⁵⁸ Seminaries are head-oriented, word focused places. The action of writing words is easier for people, than gestures and physical presence. Bartow says that preaching is turning “ink into blood,” but it may be more helpful to start with the blood pumping before committing to the ink.⁵⁹ Words are black and white and the creative process should not be so limited at its beginning stages. Allen emphasizes that it is the

⁵⁷ Todd Farley, “The Use of the Body in Performance of Proclamation,” in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 117-38.

⁵⁸ Hagen, 1612-620.

⁵⁹ Charles L. Bartow, *God’s Human Speech: a Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 53. Bartow is quoting Don Geiger.

preacher's job to bring that written performance to life in today's church. The imagination is key in creating a performance worthy of the biblical stories. Allen says, "Participating imaginatively in stories prompts listeners to imagine consciously and/or intuitively how more faithfully they could perform their lives in their own worlds as informed by the performance of the gospel narrative." A preacher must not only intellectually understand the text but be able to have a performative understanding.⁶⁰

Once a scripture and theme is selected, it may be helpful to write down brainstorming words or thoughts, but a preacher should keep them in a form that allows them to be altered. A preacher could find a song or wear a mask, and then physically rehearse the message. This does not have to be pretty or well done. It just requires a person to move and allow him or her to play and have fun. Childers says performing is not something that is limited to just a few people, but something that is in the "grasp of all human beings who are willing to play."⁶¹ A pastor should go to a place that is comfortable or the actual preaching space. Play with the space and the emotions physically. A preacher should not become self-conscious and judgmental during the preparation tasks.

Spolin was the leader in improvisational acting. She says that actors must let go of the daily fears of rejection that inhibit them. The fear of being judged does not allow actors to use their senses and experience a fresh moment that can go beyond what is comfortable.⁶² One of Spolin's first exercises to help actors express the scene is to use gibberish instead of words. Scenes that cannot be understood in gibberish are usually

⁶⁰ Allen, "Performance and the New Testament in Preaching," 103-04.

⁶¹ Childers, 101-02.

⁶² Spolin, 8, 112.

lacking what is needed for a vital stage experience. Good performance is communicating beyond just using words. Words are just part of the entire whole body organism.⁶³

This same kind of playful activity can be done once there is a rough draft written or with the scripture texts. A person can play vocally and physically simultaneously. Go sentence by sentence and play with the words. Ward says that to be given ones voice is to be set free. The voice is not just the talking mechanism. Freedom can be achieved by knowing the scripture story well, learning the voice of the scripture writer, and other discoveries that are available when reading the story orally over and over or playing with the gestures. Playfully reading the story out loud informs the inflection, pace and pitch.⁶⁴ The voice helps explore the meaning of the passage. Slow the sentence down or speed it up. Say it lying on the floor or whisper it while hiding behind the pulpit. This is not what a preacher will do in that actual performance, but there may be essential emotional insights gleaned from this type of fun activity. These games are basic performance preparation tools, which have many different varieties in all forms of acting teachings. They help find the correct impulses along with finding the right questions to provide the vocal, emotional, and physical impulses that give a person a vibrant inner life. It is brainstorming with the physical body.

There are technical ways of physically using the space in ways to help gestures communicate a story more clearly for those who still need direct guidance for good impulses. As a preacher plays with possibilities of words in improvisational storytelling, he or she can understand how various parts of the body communicate. Farley explains how physical movement with the body can help describe time and space.

⁶³ Spolin, 36.

⁶⁴ Ward, "Finding Voice in the Theological School," 141.

Farley uses the example of sheep and goats parable found in Matthew 25:31-46. The pulpit can be the neutral place where a preacher speaks his or her own words. One side of the pulpit can be used by physical gesture as the side for the goats. The other side is for the sheep. When going back to the neutral position, the physically established created imaginary spaces can be referred to with gestures and not words. It is just like the fact that gesturing forward can represent the future, backwards the past and standing still can be the present. These types of gestures use empty space in a way that gives them imaginary potential to help communicate the message.⁶⁵

Actors use their imaginations all the time to help make an audience see an empty space in a new way that becomes a part of the story. As a preacher stands in front of a congregation his or her imagination can also help paint the “stage.” It may be easier to express an image if at some point the pastor took time to “be the sheep,” in the Matthew parable.⁶⁶ To do this a preacher must be able to really visualize and express the truth of the story as understood in his or her imagination and experience. He or she then must be able to physically and vocally describe it in a way to make sure the congregation makes it part of their imaginative reality.⁶⁷

NOW Add Words

When it is finally time to commit more fully to the written sermon, it is important to not be a bad playwright.⁶⁸ A preacher should be cognizant of figures of speech such as metaphors, alliteration, synecdoche, etc. Patterns of speech are also important such as

⁶⁵ Farley, “Embodying the Message,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

⁶⁶ Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV)

⁶⁷ Adler, 294.

⁶⁸ Hagen, 1161.

rhythm, rhyme, and meter.⁶⁹ Many times the words that are written do not reflect the passion that should have been a part of the preparation process. Craddock says, “The final word about delivery has to be passion.”⁷⁰ Often, the passion gets misplaced in the writing process.

Michael Shurtleff put together an audition book that is sacred for those in the acting world called *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part*. Within it he lays out 12 guideposts that help make a short audition memorable.

1. Relationships – where’s the love?
2. Conflict - what are you fighting for?
3. The moment before - how to start a scene.
4. Humor - why jokes don’t work.
5. Opposite - finding the hidden tension in your scene.
6. Discoveries - making things happen for the first time.
7. Communication and competition - reaching the other actor.
8. Importance - locating the dramatic score.
9. Find the events - what is really happening in the play?
10. Place - create it on a bare stage.
11. Game playing and role playing - play them for reality.
12. Mystery and secret - adding wonderment to the scene.⁷¹

As a pastor begins writing the sermon, these questions and thoughts are a good way to help make sure the sermon has not gone off the path of preaching into just another well written paper. Each of the guideposts can be helpful in the preparation process. Some reflect concepts that have previously been discussed such as creating a place on a bare stage and studying the events of scripture on a hermeneutical and performative level. Several guideposts can assist in writing a good preaching monologue, and helping to make sure a sermon is actively and passionately moving forward during the writing

⁶⁹ Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 107-12.

⁷⁰ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 220.

⁷¹ Michael Shurtleff, *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003).

process. The guideposts that can help most when writing are one, two, six, seven, and eight.

Words can be a sticky subject in homiletic circles. Sermons are not articles or academic papers. As already stated a sermon should be a passionate experience for all involved in the worship. There are those who need to have each word carefully chosen. Other preachers go with just notes or a memorized outline. Some preachers are better at memorizing than others. Those who do not have word for word manuscripts should still be just as prepared about the direction and flow of the message as those who do. Those with manuscripts should be prepared not to read, but perform the message. Either way, the words that come from the preacher should be words that are faithful to the text and passionate. Theologically, preachers are called to be passionate about the “Word,” with a big “W.” The Word, *logos*, is understood to be part of God’s creative and divine process. Preachers are held accountable to the “Word” on many levels and must respond passionately to that accountability.⁷² It is the passion which will take communication of scripture to a deeper level.

Relationships, guidepost one, is an important skill in ministry. The relationship to one’s self has to be examined, relationships in the scripture must be researched, and relationships to the congregation will be discussed in chapter three. Pastors know how central building relationships are in their ministry, but often they do not use the concept of relationship in preparing the sermon. Ward also provides questions to help focus on relationships when preparing the sermon. He asks, “How does the narrator feel about what he is describing?” “How does the narrator want you to feel about it?” “What words

⁷² Bartow, “Performance Study in Service to the Spoken Word in Worship,” 215.

or phrases bring out this attitude?” and “What is God’s attitude?”⁷³ The question posed by Shurtleff in the first guidepost is “Where is the love?” If a preacher cannot remember all the questions posed by Ward, this one question is the pinnacle for all relationship questions in sermon preparation. Sometimes the answer to this question is not clearly given. If the response is not clear, then a person needs to use details given by the script or scripture to make a good hermeneutical argument for the reasoning behind the preacher’s claims in the sermon.

Shurtleff understands that humanity is constantly seeking out and responding to love. There are people who were not loved enough and others who loved someone who did not love them back. There are different levels of love and the extreme level of love that can even move into hate. People cannot hate what they do not also have the potential to love. Hate is not a term of indifference but a response to how love was not provided and fear that created hatred found its place. Therefore, when writing a sermon the question, “Where is the love?” will continue to bring a preacher back to the actions found in the scripture, the actions that are happening in today’s world, and the actions that are happening in his or her congregation. Asking “Where is the love?” and what are the relationship dynamics will help focus a preacher to understand the motives, actions, and responses that are happening in the text and must be addressed in the sermon. These actions make “playing the sermon” interesting. This makes the sermon not a show-off activity, but a compelling response to the wants found in the scripture.

The question “Where is the love?” leads directly into the next guidepost *conflict*. Asking the questions “What are you fighting for?” opens a door for preachers. First, a preacher should examine what he or she wants the congregation to hear. A pastor needs

⁷³ Ward, *Speaking of the Holy*, 86-88.

to go into a sermon wanting to *fight* for the Good News. He or she should want to *fight* that the words heard in the pews are the words God needs to share. A preacher should *fight* for God's justice, *fight* for the liberation of all of God's people, *fight* for the sick, the poor, and the voiceless. This "fight" is not a brutal concept, but one filled with passion to reach out and share the message provided by God. This question can inspire, motivate, and move people. As a preacher writes a sermon the answer to this question should be where the final paragraph moves. It should be the pinnacle point of the message.

What is great about this question is that it changes week after week and never leaves a pastor wanting for material. What those in the scripture are fighting for is different in different stories. What the characters in the Bible have to share about their passions and their fights change from verse to verse. The congregation is also constantly changing and having different needs and wants. There may be some weeks when a congregation needs to hear a sermon that fights for health, while other weeks there may be a sermon that fights for mission work. A pastor may also feel called to preach a sermon based on his or her current faith struggles.

The first two guideposts lead to guidepost six, *discoveries*. A sermon should be filled with discoveries. Spolin says, "It is the process of solving a problem that releases intelligence, talent, and genius." This process allows anyone who wants to be "stage worthy" to find a place in the theatre.⁷⁴ Even though the term "preach" has come to imply talking down to people, good sermons are adventures where everyone, including the pastor, is discovering God in the worship process. As a pastor writes a sermon, he or she will make discoveries. When presenting the sermon, a preacher should have a feeling of rediscovery when speaking. Craddock says that the process of conceiving an idea and

⁷⁴ Spolin, ii.

moving into the moment of sharing should include playing with the idea, wrestling with it, and bringing it to clarity.⁷⁵ Yes, the preacher knows what is coming in the sermon, but he or she should “act” in a way that allows him or her to participate with the congregation in the discoveries while guiding them through the message.

These discoveries have different levels of importance. A preacher must continue to focus on the central message for a sermon. He or she should not get sidetracked or try to preach five sermons in fifteen minutes. By finding what is most essential in the scripture, a preacher provides a clear and focused message. That does not mean that a message should not have obstacles and a sense of competition. It has been previously stated that preaching God’s word is important. Adler says to actors that they must be challenged to live up to the size of the script.⁷⁶ A preacher has a big script in the Bible and finding ways to wrestle with the texts and then to communicate the message clearly is part of the writing process.

After all the research, physical work, and preparation, a preacher should be able to rise to the occasion and perform well so that the congregation is able to really understand and respond. When writing, a preacher should want to make sure everyone wants to listen to what is being said because like good scripts, God’s message comes from “an author who matters to the world, who’s changed the world, not merely passed through it.”⁷⁷ A sermon for Bartow is God’s own speak, not just God’s speech talked about.⁷⁸ Good

⁷⁵ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, rev. ed. with new sermons (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 129.

⁷⁶ Adler, 265.

⁷⁷ Adler, 180.

⁷⁸ Bartow, “Discovering One’s Voice,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

storytelling will allow those who hear God's speech arrive at their own God-inspired conclusions.⁷⁹

Stories

Life is why, we tell the story. Pain is why, we tell the story. Love is why, we tell the story. Grief is why, we tell the story. Hope is why, we tell the story. Faith is why, we tell the story. *You* are why, we tell the story.⁸⁰ -*Once on this Island*

The final way that performative and homiletic approaches overlap is that both find the need to tell stories as the central goal of their art. Actors want to share stories about humanity. Preachers want to share God's stories, including those stories which are not found in the Bible. McKenzie explains that Bartow sees "preaching as an event in which *actio divina meets homo performans*." In other words, preaching is a divine action or performance combined with a human performative act.⁸¹ The wave of narrative preaching in the 20th century goes hand in hand with this action-oriented story approach that "leads a congregation through an experience of conflict and its resolution."⁸²

Christians sing out, "We love to tell the story,"⁸³ but their storytelling skills have not been tuned. Hagen says, "The daily hue and cry about an inability of human beings to communicate with each other means that not only do we not reach out to touch, but that we do not contact each other visually or auditorily."⁸⁴ It is time for preachers to see themselves as artists and begin to make contact with their congregations. Performer Evgeni Vakhtangov, another early 20th century Russian actor, said there are ghosts waiting for a person to bring them to life. The preacher should see that God's story is

⁷⁹ Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 129.

⁸⁰ Stephen Flaherty, *We Tell the Story*, libretto by Lynn Ahrens, in *Once on This Island*, original cast score (New York: 1990).

⁸¹ McKenzie, 57.

⁸² Childers, 43.

⁸³ William G. Fischer, *I Love to Tell the Story*, libretto by Arabella Katherine Hankey (Philadelphia: F.A. North, 1869).

⁸⁴ Hagen, 896.

filled with “ghosts” waiting to be given form so that the Holy Spirit can bring their stories to life in conjunction with modern stories.

Stories are made up of setting, characters, plots, and atmospheres. Stories are filled with actions, events, and experiences. Good stories have obstacles and discoveries that do not need to be commented upon in explanatory ways. Stories can come from real life, the imagination, or both together. Through a story a person discovers a new way to see and approach the world through new images created by words that build relationships.⁸⁵

Storytelling involves a beginning, middle and an end. Performers are always living out this pattern. Even in good music there is the pattern of action, reaction, and decision.⁸⁶ In Eastern theatre the beginning, middle, and end is called *jo-ha-ku*; resistance rupture, acceleration; hop, skip, jump; or other similar phrases.⁸⁷ For Christians this pattern is called life, death, and resurrection. This ongoing movement is what makes a good story have both subtle and climatic moments. This pattern helps make story creating not just narrative, but images that generate emotional responses.⁸⁸

Storytelling is Holy work. A true storytelling artist is able to elaborate his or her daydreams in a way that is enjoyable to others. He or she is able to tell the story in a sufficient way that deepens one’s faith. Many times preachers are not sure how to let the Holy Spirit move into the sermon. Storytelling is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit can interact with the preacher as he or she tries to build up the church. God is part of the present and past, and is active in the proclamation of the Word. Rottman quotes

⁸⁵ Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel*, 206-07.

⁸⁶ Merlin, 92.

⁸⁷ Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* (St. Paul, MN: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 147-48.

⁸⁸ Merlin, 97.

Craddock as saying that preaching is an event that proclaims while those experiencing the preaching participate.⁸⁹ In the next chapter, how to write stories that move and help others take action can be achieved by using performative acting tools.

Summary

Adler says, “The theatre exists on words. It exists on the literary quality of language.”⁹⁰ Preaching also exists on words in combination with the best ways to physical, mentally, and emotionally communicate those words.

In this chapter, I have examined and compared the foundational scholarships behind preaching and acting performance methods. This chapter has presented how performance and preaching study have used similar approaches in the area of mentally studying a script or scripture. Performance preparation, however, takes the preparation process to other levels, physical and emotional observations. These were once a part of rhetorical study, but at some point became absent in homiletic teaching. Homiletic professors are beginning to teach the physical and emotional levels needed to communicate well, but they do not have a consistent language. Theatre scholarship provides a consistent language to reclaim what many homeliticians are expressing is desired in good preaching. Once understanding the foundational study of acting, a preacher can begin to apply altogether mental, emotional, and physical methods to scripture and the creation of the sermon.

Allen says that the Bible is an oral happening.⁹¹ Exegetical and hermeneutical studies can be combined with performative approaches to explore the words on the Bible’s printed page. This exploration can creatively move from the scripture to the

⁸⁹ Rottman, 81.

⁹⁰ Adler, 183.

⁹¹ Allen, “Performance and the New Testament in Preaching,” 100.

sermon. This movement takes discipline and sense of playfulness. Preachers who approach a sermon with discipline and a sense of playfulness can use performance preparation methods to create sermons that build stronger faith stories for the community they serve.⁹²

⁹² Bartow, "Discovering One's Voice," in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

Chapter 4

All the World *is* God's Stage

Say as you think and speak it from your souls.

—*Henry VI*, part 2, Act 3, Scene 1

God writes a lot of comedy . . . the trouble is he's stuck with so many bad actors who don't know how to play funny.

—Garrison Keillor, *Happy to Be Here*

What has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

—John 1:3b-5 NRSV

Once a sermon is written in its first rough draft form, it is time to see if it can really “play” in a worship service. This is the time in preparation to make some definitive decisions. When musicians receive a piece of music, they begin to rehearse with a pencil in their hand to make reminders, changes, and clarifications. The arrival of the sheet music or script is not the end, it is a new beginning. Preachers should treat their manuscripts the same way.

Performing the Manuscript

An actor's script is covered with notes that provide *obstacles*, *tactics*, and *actions*. It is divided into *phrases* and *beats*. These are what make a play interesting, just as various movements, dynamics, and note combinations make music enjoyable. A manuscript can come alive for the preacher and the congregation by using these acting tools. The written sermon should include obstacles. These obstacles require tactics and

clear actions. In other words, the sermon is filled with cause and effect, receiving and responding, and becomes ultimately stimulating and interesting to experience.¹

What is the overall objective of the sermon? What does the preacher *want* the congregation to hear from the Sunday message? What is the “spine” of the message?² What is holding the message together?

The stakes should be high when answering these questions. High stakes inspire interesting responses. In preaching the stakes are high because the preacher’s commitment to proclaiming a faithful message is not a small task. The first question must be what does God *want* the preacher to say this week? How do the scripture, congregation, and other influences contribute to this message?

These types of questions may have already been answered in the writing process, but a preacher should revisit these questions to see if there really is one primary objective that is clear so that a sermon is not too general. Hagen says, “Every detail of place, objects, relationship to others, my main character needs, my immediate needs and obstacles must be made particular. Nothing should be allowed to remain general.”³

Each sermon should have one overall objective, or *super objective*.⁴ An example can be found in the play *Hamlet*. The super objective for the character of Hamlet would be something like; Hamlet wants to avenge his father’s murder. All other actions by Hamlet should lead back to that one want or super objective. As a preacher revisits the manuscript piece by piece, he or she can revisit the super objective to make sure he or she

¹ Hagen, 2312-40, 2447.

² Lewis, 112.

³ Hagen, 701-03.

⁴ Merlin, 219-25.

is being clear. This assures that each story, example, and action is moving towards the overall goal and theme of the sermon.

Unlike actors, preachers have the luxury of being able to change the written manuscript. This is a helpful tool as each phrase is examined. When reviewing the script there should be clear beginning, middles, and ends to each phrase, section, and overall manuscript. A preacher should ask, what is the overall objective of this phrase and does it coincide with the super objective of the manuscript? If the answer is, “Yes,” then is what is written *performatively interesting*?

How does a person know if something is interesting?

When I was in high school, my theatre club had a popular motto said by American carmaker Henry Ford, “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” For making cars this worked well. In theatre, however, this quote misses the point (which may explain why my club did not win as much as we thought we should). Obstacles are what make watching an event interesting. For example, sports fans want to watch the *action* of the game that leads to the end result. They become invested in the game by witnessing the obstacles that have to be overcome to win.

Sport fans sometimes say, “That team wanted it more.” Good preaching is like a coach who wants his or her team to want to know God more. Good preaching includes obstacles and moves to overcome those obstacles. Good preaching is about the overall event, not just the final outcome. Uta Hagen says, “The actions of human beings are governed, more than anything else, by what they want, consciously or subconsciously.”⁵ Preachers and congregants have to want to know God and be a part of the game.

⁵ Hagen, 83.

Therefore as preachers go through the phrases of their manuscripts, they need to start breaking the paragraphs down to find active words, phrases, and responses that are used to overcome obstacles. Mamet uses the example, “How do you know what to put in a suitcase? The answer is you pack for where you want to go.”⁶

Let’s look at an example from my own sermon. The sermon was performed during the search for an interim pastor. The scripture was the story of the Israelites worshipping the golden calf in Exodus 32:7-9 (NRSV) The overall objective for the sermon said, “*I want* to warn all of us that during a time of change it is easy to get caught up in *mooing* and dissention caused by impatience.” Let’s analyze the following phrase of the sermon by using acting methods.

Every church is filled with Golden Cows. Every life is filled with them. There are always moments when each of us is afraid to let go and enter into the new experience God is calling us to. As we hear new voices, we will be challenged to examine our Golden Cows. And do not think we do not have them.⁷

This entire section would be a *phrase*. It relates back to my *overall objective*. This section can be broken down *beat* by *beat*.

| Action | Beat |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>I want</i> to alert everyone to these headlines. | Every church is filled with Golden Cows. Every life is filled with them. |
| <i>I want</i> to comfort our fears. | There are always moments when each of us is afraid to let go and enter into the new experience God is calling us to. |
| <i>I want</i> to coach the congregation. | As we hear new voices, we will be challenged to examine our Golden Cows? |
| <i>I want</i> to raise the stakes. | And do not think we do not have them. |

←
Phrase

Preachers should refer to a thesaurus because it is necessary to find words that move and create action and appropriate gesture. It could be easy to say, “I want to

⁶ Mamet, 83.

⁷ Olivia Bryan Updegrove, “Moo,” sermon, First Christian Church, Orange, CA, October 9, 2011.

prepare the congregation” instead of “I want to *coach* the congregation.” *Prepare* does not call forward an active response. It is complacent in this instance. *Coaching* has more of gut response that may cause me to gesture in a way that relates to what I want to communicate to the congregation.⁸ Childers says a well-chosen word moves meaning forward and helps what is formed in the brain to travel through the air to another person. This word selection process assists the divine Word to shape within a preacher a message filled with faith and integrity.

A preacher should not pick big words that do not relate to him or her personally. Mamet says that actors need to find simple and clear actions to communicate. Actions should not be forced.⁹ Nor should the action words always call forth a gut response. To *comfort* someone is a more gentle and simplistic action. Adler would call it a “light level” action.¹⁰ It may not require movement, but the act of comforting requires a change in voice and demeanor. Hagen says, “The selection of the actions is like an orchestration for the theme. The individual actions are like the notes which make up the beats. The beats make up the phrase, the phrases complete the movement, and the movements make up the symphony.”¹¹

This approach is also able to be used with note preachers. If a pastor was preaching from an outline he or she may have something that looks like the example below.

The church needs to let go of Golden Cows.
(I *want* to encourage self-awareness of Golden Cows in the church.)

⁸ See Chapter 2.

⁹ Mamet, 66.

¹⁰ Adler, 1332.

¹¹ Hagen, 2393.

The wording is slightly different because there only needs to be one final want for a reference point during the sermon. There may be other wants that are a part of the phrase and preparation, but they do not need to overwhelm the final sermon outline. A preacher should keep the word for the final want selection simple. It should be an active word that moves the action forward. The word “encourage” can incorporate the more specific choices above that are part of the preparation process and is still an active moving word.

If there are sections of the manuscript that seem to be out of sync with the overall composition, then change the script to find what connects and works. Another option for a section in a sermon that seems out of place is to use that obstacle to actively engage different tactics to get back to the super objective. Obstacles are what create conflict and the elements of drama that people love to watch. Life is not filled with straight roads, and neither are sermons. Sometimes it is taking the scenic route that is more interesting.

Space

It is called the Holy of Holies, the pulpit, the chancel, or the place where a preacher must stand and proclaim the message of God. Farley says, “It is just me, a pulpit and an empty stage.”¹² All the self-examination, writing skills, and preparation tools may fly out the window when the daunting task of finally standing in the front sacred area occurs. The preacher, however, must stand and fill this space with his or her body. He or she must examine how to move and perform in this area of heightened importance so that the message is communicated well.¹³

¹² Farley, “Embodying the Message,” in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

¹³ Farley, “Use of the Body in Performance of Proclamation,” 138.

The settings of a church chancel area and a proscenium stage have similarities. They are usually up front, elevated, well lit with enhanced sound options. They are set to include the basic elements needed for the congregation to view worship. As worship and performance spaces they have a set stage ready to convey various meanings through character interaction.

Schmit points out how worship is a set of symbols working to convey information and stimulate response, just as a theatre stage has a set to do the same.¹⁴ Ward says, “The elements of space, rhythm, and sound – or line, direction, and silhouette – offer ways of seeing and seeing again and again the images from our own experience.”¹⁵ Preaching is not all about words, nor does it stand alone, but it is part of a total worship experience. The space in which preaching occurs must be approached with a sense of awareness and openness. This awareness of the elements surrounding the preaching event can then open itself to what Christians would call the Holy Spirit and the breath of God. Avant guard actor Antonin Artaud would call the stage a place where “the mythological, the magical, and the dangerous” are able to be portrayed.¹⁶ Schmit says the church expects that the symbols will enable deep feelings to be expressed, a hidden God will be revealed, and access will be provided to have God’s powers work with those worshipping.¹⁷

There are many public speakers who overlook the importance of knowing the space in which they are speaking. Speakers will pay attention to the audience and themselves, but forget to take into account the types of messages that are present just by the space. Jerry Grotowski, experimental theatre artist, said there are four essential

¹⁴ Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 14.

¹⁵ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 32.

¹⁶ Brestoff, 156.

¹⁷ Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 65.

elements in acting, the space, the actor, the spectator, and the communal exchange between the three.¹⁸

A preacher should go back to some of the playful approaches that were used during the preparation process prior to writing the sermon as a way to be informed on the dynamics of the space. Even though the space in a sanctuary is sacred, it is not unapproachable. It should be embraced by the preacher because in it lives so much possibility. Spend time in the space. Rehearse in the space. Pray in the space. What does the space smell like? What do objects feel like? What kinds of emotions are brought forth by the smells, sounds, and visuals? This examination of the space does not have a right way or a wrong way. It should be a playful way look at the environment of the performing event. Spolin says a performer should discover, without judgment, the immediate, general and larger areas of the space. The immediate is what is with people in the moment, such as a table where a person is eating. The general environment would be the room where the table is located, and the larger environment is what is beyond that room or space.¹⁹

The chancel area is the immediate area for a preacher. It needs to be the area most closely examined when finalizing how a preacher wants to communicate with the congregation. The space can include objects, sounds, or even imaginary objects created by gesture, to help create an atmosphere for the message. Farley has worked closely with mime and gives excellent examples of how to use the body and gestures to “dress the pulpit space” with ideas, movements, and clarity in the companion video with

¹⁸ Brestoff, 155.

¹⁹ Spolin, 87.

Performance in Preaching. He explains that preachers must use gestures that can help the audience's imagination see, and reflect the story on stage.²⁰

The space also allows a preacher to have physical tools which can help him or her to stay grounded and focused when preaching. Touching a pew or the communion table can help redirect a preacher's energy and keep it focused.

Energy moves in space. The distance between the chancel and the congregation assists psychologically in allowing the congregation to close the emotional and mental relationship gap when comfortable.²¹ It is easier, at times, for an audience to engage when sitting in the dark. Those in the pews must also have the freedom to choose when their energy is going to adjust and respond to the worship experience. Congregants must feel they are invited into the space in their own time. At times, however, a preacher may want to push the boundaries of comfort provided by space in order to help a congregation grow in their theological understandings.

Contemporary theatre teachers Anne Bogart and Tina Landau have developed whole new theatre method that includes elements that really focus on how to perform in a space and be connected to it. Bogart and Landau come from a dance background. Bogart and Landau have a much more physical approach to performing than Stanislavsky's inner life approach.

Bogart and Landau do not think just within the boundaries of a proscenium stage, but explore different spaces and stages through the senses in their *Viewpoint* method. There are nine Physical Viewpoints (Spatial Relationship, Kinesthetic Response, Shape, Gesture, Repetition, Architecture, Tempo, Duration and Topography). There are five

²⁰ Farley, "Embodying the Message," in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

²¹ Childers, 47.

additional Vocal Viewpoints (Pitch, Dynamic, Acceleration/Deceleration, Silence and Timbre). “Viewpoints awaken all our senses, making it clear how much and how often we live only in our heads and see only through our eyes. Through Viewpoints we learn to listen with our entire bodies and see with a sixth sense.”²²

The different Viewpoints are not all learned at one time. Like musical notes, they start one at a time and build onto one another adding different levels and then going back and reviewing the basics. Viewpoints can help a preacher use his or her senses to examine and experience the preaching space in a new and playful way. What is the spatial relationship between the baptistery and the pulpit? What happens if I run or walk slowly up the steps? What noises are being made? What shapes are made by my body when standing next to the rail? What movement occurs over and over as part of the patterns of worship? What do certain movements or items communicate implicitly or explicitly? Viewpoints provide tools that over time can really enhance the picture of worship to be more brightly colored and in focus.

Suzuki is another acting teacher that has insights into space and the theatre. Suzuki’s background comes from a combination of Eastern theatre, Noh and Kabuki, along with experiences in European theatres. From these experiences he has created his own company. Suzuki speaks in great length about why his theatre company is located in the rural village of Toga, Japan. Suzuki began to understand the importance of having a space that actors could call home.²³ He wanted a place that was the starting reference point for all other experiences. He wanted a place where there was a communal atmosphere for both the actors and the audience to engage. He wanted to create a way to

²² Bogart and Landau, 20.

²³ Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, 90.

let the unexpected occur.²⁴ Does that not sound like the church? Children are taught the church is God's home, but really God does not need a building, humans do. To be challenged, many people need a place that provides a sense of safety, support, and sacredness. To perform the actions God is calling people of faith to follow, there must be a place to prepare.

When it is time to speak, a preacher should remember that the space, and what has occurred in it before and after the sermon, will reflect upon the sermon. Whether it is a sunny or cold day will have an effect on how the space is approached and the sermon is heard by the congregation. There are constant messages and communications occurring, whether implicit or explicit, that a pastor must work to be aware of in the church space. Schmit says that the art of performing a sermon brings about symbolic forms of human feeling. Preaching is not just language, but symbols, artwork, music, and other sensory experiences that are well crafted together to proclaim the faith.²⁵ In theatre performance, directors are, "the eye and ear of the audience to come, whose energies must, at all times, be concentrated on finding deeper insights and perspectives for both actors and technical crew that will further enrich the theater communication."²⁶ Pastors must also be aware of their call to perform and also direct what is happening in the space.

There are many pieces that affect the sermon and the space is one of the primary pieces. Suzuki says, "Any actor who makes light of the fundamental physical relationships within the theatre space will discover that the matter of acting space becomes his most fundamental problem."²⁷ It is the canvas upon which the words and

²⁴ Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, 82.

²⁵ Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 84-85.

²⁶ Spolin, 297.

²⁷ Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, 36.

actions will be painted. It is the place of silence and movement. It is the Holy Ground upon which a preacher's feet walk and follow the steps of Jesus Christ.

Dress

Within the sacred space a preacher moves. This may seem obvious and yet many preachers forget that their ethos is being communicated even before any words are spoken. Farley says, "Before speaking I am communicating my word. First thing to do is gather the pause to be present. Don't panic. Focus, gather, look and begin."²⁸ The message, however, begins even before then. The way a pastor presents him or herself throughout a Sunday morning to congregants can affect the message because a relationship is already being established. Prior to the service is when a pastor should be most aware of his or her preaching presence.

Once in the chancel area a pastor is not in a casual place.²⁹ It is a place, however, that many preachers seem to treat as casual. Their ethos is one of attempting to be relatable instead of relational. Pastors want to be liked. They dress in ways that make their movements seem general and their message casual conversation. Some preachers wonder why this approach does not work week after week. It is the same reason those who are overdressed and distant do not work week after week. It is forgetting that God is a relational God, and humans are relational people who need to experience relational events that provide deep and elevated connections with God and one another. Worship should not be an academic event, nor should it be a casual event. Worship should be a God experience.

²⁸ Farley, "Embodying the Message," in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

²⁹ Adler, 2169.

There is something to “dressing the part” that can make a difference when preaching. People usually wear swim suits when they go to the pool or snow suits when they go skiing. The clothing prepares a person for the event. Worship is an event, and what a person wears affects the event. This does not mean every preacher needs to be in high church attire, but a preacher does need to be aware of how clothing alters the thinking of both the preacher and the congregation. Preachers should dress with a sense of authority. When I put on my robe and stole, I am also taking the next mental step in conveying the authority I have to preach.³⁰ This routine prepares me, just as buckling my seatbelt does in a car, to take a ride.

Preachers need to heighten their routines so they are also ready for the God experience. Hagen says, “You are helped in physical reality by the very clothes you choose to wear.”³¹ What a preacher wears helps to define his or her role in that moment. This concept has been directly experience by those who trained with Adler. Adler explains that when putting on a costume an actor is taking on another way of thinking. The costume can help dictate the character’s response. One of Adler’s exercises includes having her students come dressed in a religious outfit of some kind. The students behaviors change based on the outfit they are wearing. She says, “Playing a religious character demands a special relationship to the words.” A person does not become a good football player because he or she is wearing a uniform, preachers do not become good preachers because they put on a robe, but the outfit is a preparation tool which helps give

³⁰ Adler, 1963-2040.

³¹ Hagen, 1030.

clarity to a preacher's role and authority. Adler says to her actors, "You are God's child, not a street kid."³²

Other Performers

A preacher is not a lone performer. There is the congregation, which will be discussed in the next section, and other worship participants. If the organist and the choir director are fighting, it affects the sermon. If the person reading scripture cannot be heard, it affects the sermon. If the choir takes too long to sit down, the change in rhythm affects the sermon. Preaching is not a lone monologue. If the space is part of the sermon, then those who have been moving throughout the space are also part of the experience.

Is preaching like a play with many actors? No it is not. There are, however, some team building elements that can enhance the entire worship experience along with the sermon. There should be relationship building between those who week after week lead worship together and clarity created within the actions of the space.

Because there is no script for the interactions that occur between all of those present at worship, there are elements of improvisational theatre that can help a pastor stay connected in the moment of worship. Improvisation has rules that enable a person to respond in emotional and interesting ways to events as they occur.

A preacher should use the improvisation rule, "yes – and" as discoveries are occurring during worship. This rule implies that instead of a person responding by answering "No," a person should respond to an unexpected situation by saying, "Yes, and?"

Once I was leading worship and a homeless lady entered into the worship service and came down the aisle to ask for help. Instead of responding with the negative, "Please

³² Adler, 2122.

escort this lady out of the service,” or something similar, I connected to the moment and affirmed her presence. I released control of the situation and said, “Yes, you are here, *and* how is God going to work through this incident today?” Along with this question came the ability to invite the woman to provide details and give God the opportunity to work. Through these details her character was revealed and those listening responded and changed. Relationships were altered within the drama, and a faithful experience occurred. The church did not deny her, but said, “Yes – *and*,” as she was hugged and helped.³³

Each week the preacher is to provide leadership for the congregation to respond in a positive manner to what is planned and not planned. Having a clear framework provides freedom within the boundaries for something inspirational, dramatic, and soul-filled to occur. The homily is not always what is said in the sermon. By recognizing every person’s role in the worship event, God is revealed in more unexpected ways.

Congregation/Audience

The audience matters. The congregation matters. Allen says, “The best preaching often emerges from vital conversation that is taking place in the congregation.”³⁴ There are those in both the preaching and acting world who may argue this point, but without a congregation to lead, there is no preacher. Without an audience to watch, there is no actor.

Stanislavsky identified the idea of the *fourth wall*. This is the idea that when performing on a proscenium stage an actor should ignore the audience and pretend that there is not a big opening but a *fourth wall*. This allows the actors to focus on what is

³³ David Alger, “David Alger’s First 10 Rules of Improv,” Improv Encyclopedia, http://improvenyclopedia.org/references/David_Alger%60s_First_10_Rules_of_Improv.html (accessed November 18, 2011).

³⁴ Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel*, xii.

happening on the stage. The energy, however, from those sitting in the dark of the theatre is still present, and it is even more so on a Sunday morning when the lights are on and the preacher must face the congregation. Hagen says,

When all the work is done, every artist wants to communicate, no matter how much he may speak of 'art for art's sake.' The painter has not painted with the final goal of looking at his work alone. The writer wants readers. The musician wants to be heard. The actor must want to be seen and heard . . . and he wants his creation to meaningful to that body of people sitting in the auditorium.³⁵

The preacher wants the same as the actor.

A critic is a person who by his or her very nature judges and sets him or herself apart. The congregation is not a judge or a critic, even though it may sometimes seem that way.³⁶ Instead, worship is a time when people should come together. The preacher needs to see those watching as active participants invested in the successful outcome of the entire worship experience including the sermon. The preacher should assist the congregation in understanding that they are partners in worship. The sermon is a reflection of the ever-changing relationship between the congregation and preacher. When doing the sermon, a preacher should not be in fear of being judged, but concentrate and focus on verbal and non-verbal interactions that build relationship.

Partnership thinking encourages a preacher to not see the congregation as following, but as having equal status. Equal status does not mean that the roles are the same, but that all present are important to making the actions in the worship experience progress. In theatre there is the popular phrase, "There are no small parts, only small actors."³⁷ When a pastor teaches that everyone has an active role in the worship

³⁵ Hagen, 2764.

³⁶ Hagen, 125.

³⁷ Although no one is sure of the origin of this popular quote, several sources suggest that it is Constantine Stanislavsky who first said, "There are no small parts, only small actors."

experience, congregants begin to realize they are to be engaged and participating. Lewis says that what a person says comes from the relationship that person has to the other person. Lewis encourages actors to know as much about their audience as they can. A pastor should know his or her congregation.³⁸

The congregation will respond to what is being said or what is happening in the room during a sermon. This response is mostly nonverbal. The response of the audience should not cause the person performing to conform to what is not truthful to the script or scripture.³⁹ A preacher should not conform to make everyone comfortable and happy in all sermons, but a preacher must be aware of the intense interactions occurring between him or herself and the congregation. In return, tactics may change during a sermon performance, but the super objective does not change. Unexpected obstacles during a preaching performance can provide an opportunity for the preacher to lead the congregation back to the message in a more dramatic and interesting way.

It is important to trust in the artful experience of worship that allows everyone to invest in intense dialogue. Mamet says an audience wants to have an emotional response, and so does the congregation.⁴⁰ This emotional response comes from the human need for us all to think about the larger questions in life. It is these questions which inspire not only good plays, but the artistic inspirational words found in scripture. Sometimes there are many sides to the big questions in life and there may not always be an easy solution. Even if an answer is clear, the response may be difficult. To discuss these universal themes is to find emotional ground that everyone can relate too.

³⁸ Lewis, 151.

³⁹ Lewis, 151.

⁴⁰ Mamet, 45-46.

Universal themes are dramatic by nature. Love is universal theme that brings with it emotional anxieties and obstacles. Preachers are constantly seeking out rhetorical persuasive arguments that will convince themselves and their congregations the faithful message that all are able to be loved. If the sermon is perceived as a single monologue without the congregation as supporting cast members, then it is much more difficult to respond because each part is not treated as important, as beloved.⁴¹

Personnel and communal improvement happens when all involved in church life respond in a way that lets everyone feel more loved and accepted. A preacher sometimes speaks a message from God to the congregation and at other times speaks to God on behalf of the community. Mary Donovan Turner looks at the biblical story of Miriam with the people in the wilderness.⁴² Miriam performs for God on behalf of her community.⁴³ By doing so she improved the life of the people in the wilderness and created a communal sense of redemption for them.⁴⁴ She created a deeper sense of communion.⁴⁵ Ward says that listening to the voice of the congregation is a sacred part of the preparation process that can also reveal God's message through human experience.⁴⁶

If a congregation does not feel a pastor is responding to their voice, they will stop listening to the preacher's voice and shut out the ability for God to speak through the preacher in a sermon. Good preaching facilitates openness that helps create community

⁴¹ Spolin, 44.

⁴² Exodus 15:20-21 (NRSV)

⁴³ Turner, 87-98.

⁴⁴ Mary Donovan Turner, "Reversal of Fortune: The Performance of a Prophet," in *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*, ed. Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 96-97.

⁴⁵ Spolin, 45.

⁴⁶ Ward, "Finding Voice in the Theological School," 149.

and communion by “drawing people together in a common response.”⁴⁷ Childers says, “When all goes ideally, the preacher and the congregation are caught up in a creative process that has the power to transform both sides of the chancel.”⁴⁸ Everyone involved in a worship service does not come just with their intellect, but they come with their emotions wanting to be engaged in an intense dialogue with God.⁴⁹ If a congregation does not seem to be responding well to the messages, then it may be a warning sign that the congregation is not an engaged participant and instead is able to stand back and be a critical judge.

Preach! Passion!

In the Christian world there is the popular phrase, “Let go and let God.” In the theatre world everyone is constantly encouraged to “Live in the moment.” For me these two phrases should be combined and say, “Let go so you can live in God’s moment.”

There is a moment when it is time for a preacher to *preach*. There is a time when a preacher must trust the preparation work that has been done so that he or she can be fully present and prophetic. Schmit says, “The sermon does not consist of preparation, but surely emerges from it.”⁵⁰ Being fully present is prophetic. Meisner says to actors, “Don’t be an actor. Be a human being who works off what exists under imaginary circumstances. Don’t give a performance. Let the performance give you.” Hagen says, “To act is to do, not to think.”

The time of preparation is over and a preacher must be vulnerable and trust that the foundation that has been laid to lead the congregation in a worshipful response. A

⁴⁷ Childers, 37.

⁴⁸ Childers, 52.

⁴⁹ Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 20.

⁵⁰ Schmit, “*What Comes Next?*” 175.

good preacher cannot be detached during a sermon. A preacher should not be thinking about vocal exercises or get so caught up in what is written on the page that he or she cannot perform it. Rottman says the preparation has made it possible to “preserve the mysterious tension between human responsibility and divine initiative.”⁵¹ The message of God cannot be controlled. It is bigger than just one person. The size of a sermon should be large enough to allow for divine participation in the preparation *and* final production.⁵²

A preacher cannot think about “preaching” during a sermon. A preacher needs to be actually talking, listening, looking, and responding. These are what are involved with the act of preaching. Lewis says, “The main danger in ‘lessons’ is forgetting that the work in the classroom is only preparation for the stage, not an end in itself.”⁵³ Everything up to the preaching moment is just tools that are working to help the circuits be open from the head, to the heart, to the soul, and to the people. A pastor finally needs to do as Lewis says and, “. . . give in to it, surrender to it, believe in it, let it happen.”⁵⁴ The message should not be reflecting inward, but should be moving *out* to the people.⁵⁵ A preacher needs to keep moving forward through each shared moment.⁵⁶

It is scary place to not have complete control, but both actors and preacher must be willing to respond in the moment to the current situation. Suzuki says, “All of us must live our lives with the help of a certain amount of conscious planning and organization. But every aspect cannot be planned. We must always realize the extreme value of the spontaneous and the unexpected.”⁵⁷

⁵¹ Rottman, 85-86.

⁵² Childers, 27.

⁵³ Lewis, vii.

⁵⁴ Lewis, ix.

⁵⁵ Adler, 520.

⁵⁶ Jana Childers interviewing Richard F. Ward, in *Performance in Preaching*, DVD.

⁵⁷ Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, 86.

Something usually goes off plan and that is okay. When an actor speaks in front of an audience, there is always the risk of forgetting lines. Merlin says, “. . . knowing our lines is the least the audience will expect of us, and it’s the last we should expect of ourselves.” She says that an actor, just like a preacher, should trust that you have done the work and can now be open to going somewhere truly exciting. There is a deeper level of communication that can go beyond words and gestures. Stanislavsky called it, “. . . invisible radiations of will, vibrations which flow back and forth between the soul.”⁵⁸ A preacher must trust in the mysterious and intimate events that can happen when God is invited to be in the moment and true communion is possible to achieve. Good preparation will make the preacher conscious of the musicality in the sermon and how to keep it flowing even if a “note goes off.”⁵⁹

During a performance a preacher should bring passion. Passion goes beyond words and gestures. Ward says, “Those speakers who communicate with energy, conviction, emotion, and who establish contact with their audiences are having a greater impact than those who speak as emotionally detached commentators on events or ideas.” Passion performs in such a way that the minds and hearts of those in the congregation can be moved.⁶⁰

Summary

Once the manuscript is written the playfulness and the questions do not end. The manuscript is broken down into *phrases* and *beats* so that the overall objective of the

⁵⁸ Constantine Stanislavsky, *Creating a Role*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Routledge, 1989), 31.

⁵⁹ Schmit, “What Comes Next?” 170.

⁶⁰ Ward, *Speaking from the Heart*, 24.

sermon has a sense of musicality and drama. There are obstacles and tactics that engage the worship participants during the sermon.

Preparation also includes a pastor having an awareness of the physical space, movements in the space, and the people in the space. A preacher should take time to study the preaching space and those moving in the space, including the congregation. By knowing that all the preparation work has been a done, a preacher will have the foundation needed to really let go and passionately preach. As Mamet says to actors there comes a moment when a person must, “Open the mouth, stand straight, and say the words bravely.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Mamet, 57.

Chapter 5

A Truthful Conclusion

Truth is truth
To the end of reckoning.
—*Measure for Measure* Act 5, Scene 1

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.
—2 Corinthians 13:8 NRSV

Suzuki sees an actor as a person who is using words and gestures to convince an audience that something is profoundly true.¹ “Truth” is a word that has multiple levels of understanding. Those individuals who have stood in front of a jury, an audience, or a congregation are ultimately trying to communicate their understanding of truth on personal and societal levels.

Truth is associated with other words such as true, authentic, certain, or honest. As young children learn, the opposite of true is false. The opposite of *truth* is more complicated because it does not deal with black and white facts. Truth deals with questions in the “gray areas” of life. Every person and society’s truths may be different because of a different set of values or experiences. Those who stand on a stage and perform a play are working to understand the values and experiences of the characters

¹ Suzuki, *The Way of Acting: The Theatre Writings of Tadashi Suzuki*, 5.

and the world of the play. The actor is hoping that honest interaction onstage is relatable, challenging, and engaging to those sitting and watching. It is not about being right or wrong, but justifying the motivations behind the choices of the character and dealing with the consequences of those choices.

As a pastor and a preacher, I seek out God's truth. This is not the simplistic childhood understanding of factual truths. It is a theological truth that is justified by my values and experiences of a loving God whose love is best experienced through Jesus Christ. Is this the only truth? Depending on a person's values and experiences, this answer may be different. Whatever the answer, the person answering is sharing what he or she understands to be true. It is his or her justified *truth* and reality, even if it may not be theologically sound.

Hagen says, "To bring to an audience the revelation of the failings and aspirations, the dreams and desires, the negative and the positive aspects of human beings – this is what we should set as our goal as committed theater artists."² Preachers commit to make sure what they preach is a justified theological truth through the exegetical process. Pastors spend their lives involved with those members of their congregation to be able to relate to their world truths. Prophets move outside of their comfort zones to see truths in other parts of the world. When it comes time to stand in the pulpit and express these truths that have been revealed, a preacher should be able to stand as a *person* worthy and ready to portray the power of a faithful, inspirational, and truthful response.

This project has begun to provide an awareness of basic theatrical methods and tools in comparison with current homiletic approaches. These methods include self-awareness and self-care so that a preacher is physically, mentally, and emotionally able to

² Hagen, 2859.

be a truthful instinctual transmitter of the faith. It has introduced a common language created by Stanislavsky that is used by most actors. This language can be a foundational way for preachers to communicate with one another how to prepare sermons that have more depth and levels. This project has provided performative questions and creative ways to help a preacher remain consistently engaged in an inspirational preparation process that ultimately strives to clearly communicate a truthful and faithful message to the congregation.

Current homiletic teachers have begun to overlap performative ideas into their lessons, but there is more that can be done. By establishing a common theatrical language, new creative possibilities can be used in preaching from learning the lessons taught by those in acting. Preaching focuses on good hermeneutical and exegetical truth, but acting focuses on the most powerful ways to communicate that truth by combining the body, mind, and emotions. Instead of teaching basic performative methods after basic preaching, they should be taught in conjunction with one another.

Those who are teaching performative preaching methods must continue to take their teaching to another level and trust that their students can go to that level. They must teach performative methods in a way that enables their preaching students to have a greater knowledge and set of tools once in the pastorate that can be used week after week. There must be a trust that performative methods can help find the truth in a sermon that resonates on a deeper level with those in the pews. *If pastors cannot reach those in the congregation, then the church is in trouble.* Those in the pulpits must trust the work provided by performative methods, and begin to express their importance outside of the academic structure. The influence in the pulpit should not just come from knowing Karl

Barth, but knowing Constantine Stanislavsky. The influences should come from not just knowing the work of Jana Childers, but the work of Anne Bogart. The option to use acting performance methods as the primary foundation for homiletic education, and not just an addition, can enhance the preaching, learning and application process.

I have worked to create a syllabus and workshops that will introduce the important parallels and lessons that performance methods can provide in the preaching preparation process. It is significant for those beyond the academic world to invest into performative methods as a way to enrich preaching and overall pastorates when working in a congregation.

Acting and preaching have been in the same rhetorical family for hundreds of years because persuasive methods work. Preachers need to reclaim their theatrical roots because performance methods provide the tools to help pastors best prepare for preaching. Childers says, "Theatre and preaching share the essential characteristics and qualities that can be said to be true of art in general: each probes for meaning; each is organic by nature; interest and integrity are requisite; distance plays a role; experience is the goal."³ Performance methods give pastors a language, skills, techniques and practical tools that over time can be used to not only passionately know God's truth, but allows a preacher to share the "Good News" of God's loving truth in more imaginative, intentional, active, enlivened, engaging, inspiring, creative, and *truthful* way.

³ Childers, 37.

APPENDIX A

Syllabus

Performance and Preaching Preparation Methods

Olivia Bryan Updegrove

This class will be a disciplined and playful atmosphere that will encourage creativity throughout the preparation process for preaching. This class will require physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Each week there will be movement exercises, creative discoveries, and engaging discussions. It will bring together the theater performance world and homiletic world in ongoing dialogue.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to approach the sermon preparation process in a physical, mental, and emotional way.
2. Students will be able to identify basic acting methods and terms and know how to apply them to their personal growth as a preacher.
3. Students will be able to identify homileticians who have begun to apply performative methods in preaching preparation.

Required Reading/Materials

Composition Book or Spiral Notebook

Please come to class dressed in a way that allows movement. (No skirts/dresses, uncomfortable shoes, etc.) Preaching days are the exception.

Childers, Jana, and Clayton J. Schmit, eds. *Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life*. DVD. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Brestoff, Richard. *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*. Lyme, NH: Smith & Kraus, 1995.

Shurtleff, Michael. *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part*. New York: Walker & Company, 2003.

Assessment Strategies

1. Class participation, attendance, and timeliness are mandatory. Missing one class without a previously approved excuse will result in a lower grade. Consistent tardiness will also result in a lower grade. At the end of the class the composition/notebook will be examined to make sure in-class assignments were completed.
2. Each week a student will turn in a one page paper on one of the reading assignment for the week.
3. Each student will write a 10-12 page mid-term paper on one of the following: Constantine Stanislavsky, Uta Hagen, Stella Adler, Harold Clurman, Robert Lewis, Lee Strasburg, Viola Spolin, Bertold Brecht, Jerry Grotowski, Tadashi Suzuki, Anne Bogart, Aaron Speiser Studio, William Esper Studio, Alexander Technique, Arthur Lessac, or Sanford Meisner.

This paper is to focus on the methods of the person selected and how these methods can or cannot be applied to sermon preparation.

4. Each student will write a 10-12 page final paper on the written works of one of the following: Charles Bartow, Jana Childers, Richard Ward, Craig Schmit, Todd Farley, Mary Donovan Turner, Alyce McKenzie, John Rottman, Fred Craddock, or Ronald J. Allen.

The focus of this paper should be on how the writers apply performative methods to preaching.

5. Each student will preach a sermon on a theme or 3-6 scriptural verses.

SERMON PERFORMANCE

1. 10 Minutes – Warm Up
2. 10-20 Minutes – Sermon (Time limit will be enforced.)
3. 30 Minutes - Student written and verbal responses.

Grading

The final grade will be based on the following:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| Attendance – Composition Book - Participation | 50% |
| Mid-Term Paper | 15% |
| Final Paper | 15% |
| Sermon | 15% |
| One Page Articles | 5% |

Course Schedule: (Based on 3 Hour Classes, 12 Students)

- Class 1: Hour One:
 Physical Assignment: Take a Walk (30 Minutes)
 Creative Assignment: Prepare a Story While Walking and then
 Write Basic Details in Composition Book (20 Minutes)
- Hour Two:
 Review Syllabus and Assignments
 Break
- Hour Three:
 Share Stories (3 Minutes)
- Class 2: Assignments:
 Ward, *Finding Voice in Theological School* from (PIP)
 Bartow, *Performance Study in Service to the Spoken Word in
 Worship* from (PIP)
 Brestoff, *Introduction*
- Hour One:
 Physical Assignment: Stand in Chancel
- Hour Two:
 Continue Standing in Chancel Assignment
 Discuss Standing in Chancel Experience (Ethos, Presence)
- Hour Three:
 Discuss Readings
- Class 3: Assignments:
 Childers, *The Preacher's Creative Process: Reaching the Well*
 (PIP)
 Rottman, *Performative Language and the Limits of Performance in
 Preaching* from (PIP)
 Brestoff, *Acting May Be Hazardous to Your Health!*
 Select Sermon Scripture (3-6 verses): Bring Every Week
- Hour One:
 Creative Assignment: Brainstorm in Journal: Music, Artwork, and
 thoughts based on Scripture. (30 Minutes)
 Begin 5 minute sermons
- Hour Two:
 Present 5 minute sermons
- Hour Three:
 Discuss 5 minute sermons
 Discuss Readings

- Class 4: Assignments:
 MIDTERM PAPER
 Brestoff, *The Russian Revolution*
 Brestoff, *Smashing the Fourth Wall*
 Hour One-Two:
 Quiz: Stanislavsky Terms: Definitions
 Watch Performance in Preaching DVD
 Hour Three:
 Discuss Video and MIDTERM Papers
- Class 5: Assignments:
 Shurtleff, *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part*
 Brestoff, *Viola Spolin and the Theatre of Games*
 Hour One:
 Discuss Audition Methods
 Hour Two:
 Discuss Improve Rules
 Hour Three:
 Physical/Creative Assignment: Improv Games
- Class 6: Assignments:
 Farley, *the Use of the Body in the Performance and Proclamation*
 from (PIP)
 Brestoff, *Lee Strasburg*
 Hour One:
 Scripture Overall Objectives, Beats, and Tactics
 Hour Two:
 Creative Assignment: 5 Senses
 Hour Three:
 Discuss Readings
- Class 7: Assignments:
 Brestoff, *Sanford Meisner*
 1st Draft: Prepared Sermon Manuscript (bring to class)
 Hour One:
 Creative Assignment: Meisner Games
 Hour Two:
 Physical Assignment: Objectives, Beats, Actions, Questions,
 Words, Silence
 Hour Three:
 Physical Assignment: Talk to the Wall

- Class 8: Assignment:
 Allen, *Performance and the New Testament in Preaching* from (PIP)
 Turner, *Reversal of Fortune: The Performance of a Prophet* (PIP)
 Wilson, *Preaching, Performance, and the Life and Death of "Now"* from (PIP)
 Bring a song that inspires your sermon
 Hour One:
Physical/Creative Assignment: Masks
 Hour Two:
Physical/Creative Assignment: Dance
 Hour Three:
 Discuss Readings
- Class 9: Assignment:
 Brestoff, *Stella Adler*
 Color Anatomy Page
 Hour One:
Creative Assignment: Dress Up
 Hour Two:
 Discuss Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants)
Creative Assignment: Scripture Mark-Up
 Hour Three:
 Discuss Body
Physical Assignment: Relaxation-Breathing Exercises
- Class 10: Assignment:
 Schmit, *What Comes Next? Performing Music and Proclaiming the Word* from (PIP)
 McKenzie, *At the Intersection of Actio Divina and Homo Performans: Embodiment and Evocation* (PIP)
 Brestoff, *Tadashi Suzuki and the Theater of Grandeur*
 Hour One:
 Discuss Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants) Part II
 Hour Two:
Creative Assignment: Space (Implicit, Explicit, Senses, Describe)
 Hour Three:
Physical Assignment: Group Games
- Class 11: Hour One:
 SERMON 1
 Hour Two:
 SERMON 2
 Hour Three:
 SERMON 3

- Class 12: Hour One:
 SERMON 4
 Hour Two:
 SERMON 5
 Hour Three:
 SERMON 6
- Class 13: Hour One:
 SERMON 7
 Hour Two:
 SERMON 8
 Hour Three:
 SERMON 9
- Class 14: Hour One:
 SERMON 10
 Hour Two:
 SERMON 11
 Hour Three:
 SERMON 12
- Class 15: Assignment:
 FINAL Paper Due
 Discussion on FINAL PAPER

Workshop Versions

There may not be the opportunity to teach an entire class. Below are various strategies for different time restrictions.

Version One: (6 Hours) – Six Hour Sessions, Three Two Hour Sessions

Version Two: (3 Hours) – Three One Hour Sessions, One Three Hour Session

Version Three: (1- 1 ½ Hour) – Workshop

Version One: (6 Hours) – Six Hour Sessions, Three Two Hour Sessions

Hour One:

5 Minutes: Prayer - Basic Introduction

20 Minutes: Presence Exercise

20 Minutes: Discuss Presence Exercise

Hour Two:

5 Minutes: Prayer - Basic Introduction

50 Minutes: Discuss Terms (Stanislavsky, Senses, Anatomy)

Hour Three:

5 Minutes: Prayer - Basic Introduction

15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups

Roll Down Exercise, Facial Exercises, Breathing, Humming

20-30 Minutes: Play With Scripture Words: Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants), Physical Expression of Words

Hour Four:

5 Minutes: Prayer – Basic Introduction

15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups

Roll Down Exercise, Tongue Twisters, Stretching, Sing

20-30: Silently Act Out Scriptures (Beats, Objectives, Tactics)

Hour Five:

5 Minutes: Prayer – Basic Introduction

15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups

20-30 Minutes: Answer and Discuss Brainstorm Questions:

What does this scripture . . . smell, taste, feel, sound, look like?

Where is the passion in this scripture?

What does the author want to communicate?

What does this scripture make you want to communicate?

What images, music, stories come to you from this scripture?

←
Session One

←
Session Two

Hour Six:

5 Minutes: Prayer – Basic Introduction
 15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups
 20 Minutes: Shurtleff Audition and Spolin Improv Rules
 20 Minutes: Outline Sermon

Session Three**Version Two: (3 Hours) – Three One Hour Sessions, One Three Hour Session**

This session would have to be able to be altered based on number of people and space. This is just an outline to help assist once people and space has been determined.

Hour One:

5 Minutes: Prayer - Basic Introduction
 15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups
 Roll Down Exercise, Facial Exercises, Breathing, Humming
 20-30 Minutes: Play With Scripture Words: Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants), Physical Expression of Words

Hour Two:

5 Minutes: Prayer – Basic Introduction
 15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups
 Roll Down Exercise, Tongue Twisters, Stretching, Sing
 20-30: Silently Act Out Scriptures (Beats, Objectives, Tactics)

Hour Three:

5 Minutes: Prayer – Basic Introduction
 15 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups
 20-30 Minutes: Answer and Discuss Brainstorm Questions:
 What does this scripture . . . smell, taste, feel, sound, look like?
 Where is the passion in this scripture?
 What does the author want to communicate?
 What does this scripture make you want to communicate?
 What images, music, stories come to you from this scripture?

Version Three: (1- 1 ½ Hour) – Workshop

Title: Read Passionately
 5 Minutes: Prayer - Basic Introduction
 10 Minutes: Physical and Vocal Warm-Ups
 Roll Down Exercise, Facial Exercises, Breathing, Humming
 20-30 Minutes: Play With Scripture Words: Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants), Physical Expression of Words
 20-30 Minutes: Answer and Discuss Brainstorm Questions:
 What does this scripture . . . smell, taste, feel, sound, look like?
 Where is the passion in this scripture?
 What does the author want to communicate?
 What does this scripture make you want to communicate?
 What images, music, stories come to you from this scripture?

Descriptions

Breakdown of Class and Workshop Activities

Below the Class Activities are divided and described. If an activity is also part of the workshop experience there is citation listed.

Theatre methods do require people who have been trained in the method to teach them on a deeper level. Those using this resource need to make sure they have been trained.

Class 1: Take a Walk (30 Minutes)

| Title: <i>Take a Walk</i> | Assessment Questions: |
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| Explanation: This activity is a basic walk. It encourages participants to begin to understand the preaching preparation is not just a classroom, head-oriented process. It is a process that needs to embrace what is outside of the classroom in a physically engaged way. At the same time as observing nature, the student must be concentrating on a given task. This encourages awareness outside and inside of one's self at the same time. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the participant physically fit? 2. Is the participant able to concentrate on the task of preparing a story while observing outside stimuli with the five senses? 3. What is it like to be mentally and physically engaged at the same time in an activity? |

Prepare a Short Story

| Title: <i>Prepare a Short Story (While Doing Another Physical Activity) and Present the Story</i> | Assessment Questions: |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Explanation: This exercise also forces the participants outside of their comfort zone by quickly placing them in a public speaking situation within a classroom/workshop area. This activity is not to be judged by the students or professor. It is to be a tool to see what other performance tools may be helpful to the student. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What imaginative direction did the participant's story take in the limited amount of time provided? 2. What rhetorical abilities does the participant already possess? <p><i>Post Experience</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the overall experience like for the participant? (Post Performance) 2. What was it like to have a short period of time to prepare? 3. What was it like to be physically and mentally engaged in an activity? 4. What were the distractions? 5. What was it like to be physically engaged in the creative process? |

Class 2: Stand in Chancel – Presence Exercise (Version One/Hour One)

| Title: <i>Presence Exercise</i> | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: This exercise has many levels. It is simple in nature, but difficult for some of those participating. This exercise assesses a participant's trust in just being. There is no talking and no movement. It is just standing in the chancel area one at a time for about one or two minutes in silence. This exercise is about assessing presence or ethos.</p> <p>Once the exercise is finished, there are different ways to help explain how to work on having presence and a sense of authority with various performance energy exercises.</p> | <p>1. What does the speaker communicate when entering, standing, and exiting the chancel area?</p> <p>2. What type of energy did the participant have in their body?</p> <p><i>Post Experience - To the Participants:</i></p> <p>1. What was this experience like?</p> <p>2. What did you notice about yourself during the experience?</p> <p>3. What did you notice about others?</p> |

Class 3: Brainstorm in Journal: Music, Artwork, and thoughts based on Scripture.

| Title: <i>Creative Mental Brainstorming</i> | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: Take scripture texts, 3-6 verses, and have each participant just brainstorm silently on a piece of paper (or in a journal). This is to encourage engaging with the text outside of typical exegetical methods in a mental way.</p> | <p><i>Pre-Experience – To the Participants:</i></p> <p>1. What words speak to you in the scripture?</p> <p>2. What sounds do you think were occurring when the scripture was written?</p> <p>3. What music comes to mind?</p> <p>4. What artwork comes to mind? Colors?</p> <p>5. What kind of drawing would you make to describe this story?</p> <p>6. Anything goes on this paper!</p> <p><i>Post Experience – To the Participants:</i></p> <p>1. What was this experience like?</p> <p>2. What did you discover about the scripture?</p> |

Class 4: Stanislavsky Terms (Version One/Hour Two)

| Title: Basic Stanislavsky Terms | Assessment Questions: |
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| This is a time to explain the importance of the language Stanislavsky created, and review the most basic terms he created during his life. | This activity is more explanation and review of terms. Throughout the exercise it is important to ask questions that make the connections of why these terms are a good language to use when approaching the sermon preparation process. |
| <p>Terms:</p> <p><i>Relaxation:</i> If someone is told to relax, that person quickly tenses up. Relaxation is one of the toughest reactions for a person to accomplish. One of the first ways to help a person relax is to focus on breathing exercises.</p> <p><i>Concentration:</i> Concentration is an action. It is not a frozen response, but requires a mind that is alive and active. Concentration can begin with a person having attention on something very small and then expanding that circle to something larger.</p> <p><i>Imagination:</i> The imagination is the <i>inner creative state</i>. It is the place where inspiration and spirit reside.</p> <p><i>Given Circumstances:</i> The imagination is activated by the details found in the text. This includes the character facts, play facts, events, epoch, time, and place of action.</p> <p><i>Magic "If:"</i> The details not found in the text use the magic "if." The question asked is what would the character do <i>if</i> . . . ? The answers to this question are best chosen when a person is observant of the <i>given circumstances</i> and is able to respond intuitively.</p> <p><i>Action:</i> Action is the process when a performer breathes life into the words based on the previous information gathered. Actions occur by overcoming <i>obstacles</i> in different sections, or <i>beats</i>, with various tactics.</p> <p><i>Sensory Recall:</i> This is one of the most debated aspects of Stanislavsky's Method. It calls upon the five senses to recall a previous experience and make it fresh. Some acting teachers have taken this tactic to the extreme when asking performers to recall traumatic experiences in their life as if they were currently happening again.</p> <p>Plus: <i>Inner Life, Outer Life, Beats, and Objectives</i></p> | |

Class 5: Discuss Audition Methods

| Title: <i>Shurtleff's Audition Methods</i> | Assessment Questions: |
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| This is a time to explain how Shurtleff's audition questions and approaches are helpful in the writing preparation process. | This activity is more explanation and review of terms. Throughout the exercise it is important to ask questions that make the connections of why these terms are a good language to use when approaching the sermon preparation process. |
| Terms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relationships – where's the love? 2. Conflict - what are you fighting for? 3. The moment before - how to start a scene. 4. Humor - why jokes don't work. 5. Opposite - finding the hidden tension in your scene. 6. Discoveries - making things happen for the first time. 7. Communication and competition - reaching the other actor. 8. Importance - locating the dramatic score. 9. Find the events - what is really happening in the play? 10. Place - create it on a bare stage. 11. Game playing and role playing - play them for reality. 12. Mystery and secret - adding wonderment to the scene.¹ | |

¹ Michael Shurtleff, *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003).

Discuss Improv Rules

| Title: <i>Improvisational Rules</i> | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: There are some basic rules that improvisational actors follow. These rules can lead to creative and intuitive responses when working with the given circumstances of the text and an event.</p> | <p>This activity is more explanation and review of terms. Throughout the exercise it is important to ask questions that make the connections of why these terms are a good language to use when approaching the sermon preparation process.</p> |
| <p>Rules of Improv</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Say Yes-and! For a story to be built, whether it is short form or long form, the players have to agree to the basic situation and set-up. The who, what, and where have to be developed for a scene to work. 2. After the “and” add new information. An improvised scene can't move forward or advance unless we add new information. That is why new information is added after the “Yes” of “Yes-and!” 3. Don't Block. The opposite of saying yes-and is blocking or denial. 4. Avoid Questions. A form of blocking (in its more subtle form) is asking questions. Questions force our partners to fill in the information or do the work. It is a way of avoiding committing to a choice or a detail. It is playing it safe. However, on more advanced levels, questions can be used to add information or tell your partner the direction to go in. 5. Focus on the Here and Now. Another useful rule is to keep the focus on the here and now. A scene is about the people in the scene. The change, the struggle, the win or loss will happen to the characters on the stage. Focus on what is going on right this at this moment. 6. Be Specific- Provide Details! Details are the lifeblood of moving a scene forward. Each detail provides clues to what is important. Details help provide beat objectives and flesh out characters. 7. Change, Change, Change! Improv is about character change. The characters in a scene must experience some type of change for the scene to be interesting. Characters need to go on journeys, be altered by revelations, experience the ramifications of their choices and be moved by emotional moments. 8. Build Relationships. A long form improv set should contain a variety of scenes. Some scenes will be emotional, some will be tense, and some should be funny. The easiest way to make a scene serious is by focusing on the relationship of those on the stage (their characters).² | |

² David Alger, “David Alger’s First 10 Rules of Improv,” Improv Encyclopedia, http://improvenyclopedia.org/references/David_Alger%60s_First_10_Rules_of_Improv.html (accessed November 18, 2011).

Improv Games

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title: Improv Games | Assessment Questions: |
| Explanation: There are LOTS of different improv games. I encourage someone who has a large interest in improve to purchase Viola Spolin's book <i>Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques (Drama and Performance Studies)</i> . It is also helpful to watch reruns of <i>Whose Line is It Anyway?</i> | <i>Post Experience – To the Participants:</i> 1. What was this experience like? 2. How do you not judge yourself? 3. What was fun? 4. What was difficult? 5. What from this exercise may help you in preparing a sermon? 6. What from this exercise may help inform you as a pastor? |

Class 6: Objectives, Beats, and Tactics (Class 7 with Manuscript) (Version One/Hour Four) (Version Two/Hour Two)

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title: Objective, Beats, and Tactics | Assessment Questions: |
| Explanation: An actor's script is covered with notes that provide obstacles, tactics, and actions. It is divided, like a music score, into <i>phrases</i> and what is termed by actors as <i>beats</i> . The phrases and beats lead to the overall <i>objective</i> of the manuscript. See below for an example. | 1. What does the scripture <i>want</i> ? 2. What does the preacher <i>want</i> ? 3. What does the congregation <i>want</i> ? 4. What does God <i>want</i> ? |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Overall Sermon Objective</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“I want to warn all of us that during a time of change it is easy to get caught up in <i>mooing</i> and dissention caused by impatience.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Sermon Section</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Every church is filled with Golden Cows. Every life is filled with them. There are always moments when each of us is afraid to let go and enter into the new experience God is calling us to. As we hear new voices, we will be challenged to examine our Golden Cows? And do not think we do not have them.</i>³</p> | |
| Action | Beat |
| <i>I want to alert everyone to these headlines.</i> | Every church is filled with Golden Cows. Every life is filled with them. |
| <i>I want to comfort our fears.</i> | There are always moments when each of us is afraid to let go and enter into the new experience God is calling us to. |
| <i>I want to coach the congregation.</i> | As we hear new voices, we will be challenged to examine our Golden Cows? |
| <i>I want to hook them back.</i> | And do not think we do not have them. |

Phrase

³ Olivia Bryan Updegrave, “Moo,” sermon, First Christian Church, Orange, CA, October 9, 2011.

**5 Senses (Version One/Hour Two and Five)
(Version Two/Hour Three) (Version Three)**

| Title: Five Senses | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: This exercise is simple in nature. It deals with making sure all five senses are engaged in the approach to the sermon. The questions are what drive this exercise. There can be two levels to this exercise.</p> <p>Level One: A person should quietly answer the questions on a piece of paper or in his or her mind. The answers should come from the circumstances surrounding the scripture, the written manuscript, and the presentation environment. These responses can then be shared out loud with other participants and discussed.</p> <p>Level Two: A section of scripture or a manuscript is read and together other participants answer the questions about the five senses and share in a non-judgmental atmosphere.</p> | <p>These questions may have to alter slightly based on the text chosen to analyze. It is important to do these questions in this order because the more difficult questions come first. People have an easier time relying on what is seen and heard.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you/others smell when experiencing this text? Why? 2. What do you/others smell when experiencing this text? Why? 3. What do you/others feel when experiencing this text? Why? 4. What do you/others hear when experiencing this text? Why? 5. What do you/others see when experiencing this text? Why? |

Class 7: Meisner Games

| Title: Meisner Games | Assessment Questions: |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Explanation: There is no easy way to explain Meisner's method. Please refer to resources and trainers before working with his exercises. Primarily his repetition game would be used as an introduction to his technique. Meisner's technique, at its first level, focuses on listening and responding truthfully.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was the experience of this exercise like for you? |

Talk to the Wall

| Title: Talk to the Wall | Assessment Questions: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <p>Explanation: I have spent much of my life talking to walls and have yet to find myself in an institution. A wall is a wonderful audience during preparation. It does not judge. It listens. It allows for changes in physical, emotional, mental, etc. approaches. Talking to a wall can be done during the brainstorming process. Once a manuscript has been put together in a rough draft with objectives, beats, and other questions answered, it is time to revisit the wall. Taking time to speak out loud what is written or being brainstormed while being physically upright can open a whole new world for helping a person find his or her voice. Participants go to a wall and spend time talking to it.</p> | <p>1. What was that experience like?</p> |

Some of the next few exercises will not be able to be performed by every participant due to time constraints. It is important for the leader to make sure everyone is able to participate in one of the experiences and in the discussion.

Class 8: Masks

| Title: Masks, Dance, and Dress Up | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: These three activities are somewhat similar in nature. They require a participant to perform and communicate the manuscript in physical ways.</p> <p>Masks: A participant puts on a mask and physically tries to communicate parts of his or her sermon or scripture.</p> <p>Dance: A participant finds a song that seems to communicate the message of the overall objective and then physically “dances” to express the sermon.</p> <p>Dress Up: A participant continuously changes dress-up outfits (masks, scarves, glasses, etc.) and uses the words from the manuscript as the character portrayed.</p> | <p><i>Post Experience – To the Participant:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was that experience like? 2. What did you discover <p><i>Post Experience – To the Audience:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you experience when watching? 2. How were these exercises different? The same? |

Dance (See Masks Above)

Class 9: Dress Up (See Masks Above)**Color Anatomy Page**

| Title: Color Anatomy Page | Assessment Questions: |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Explanation: This exercise does not require a performer to become a doctor. It is basically an exercise which helps the participant become more aware of his or her physical instrument on a scientific level. It is important for a performer to know certain parts of their body. Taking time to color the anatomy of the body helps to create a better sense of awareness that the body is a complex organism for communication.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your personal center of gravity? 2. Where do you keep your stress/tension? <p><i>Questions and responses that deal with various parts of the body.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Where is the spine located? 4. What part of the mouth do Americans use make talking sounds? |

Relaxation-Breathing Exercises

| Title: Relaxation-Breathing Exercises | Assessment Questions: |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Explanation: There are lots of good ways for a participant to enhance his or her breathing. The most popular are the “roll down” exercise, guided meditation, and “tense and release.” <i>Basic</i> descriptions are below.</p> <p>Roll Down: Starting with the release of the head and neck, the body follows the head forward to the ground. This is done slowly. The spine is carefully following the head until the person is bent over from the hip joints and arms are touching the floor. Then a person slowly rolls back up in the opposite order.</p> <p>Guided Meditation: Participants are asked to close their eyes and relax (preferably laying face up on the floor). After a few deep breaths, the leader begins with the feet and encourages images of relaxation to occur throughout the body as tension is released and let go. Once the entire body has been relaxed, a meditation story or journey can be described.</p> <p>Tense and Release: This is a simple exercise that can be done by anyone quickly before performing. A participant is</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Was it hard to “let go?” 2. What was the guided meditation experience like? |

encouraged to tense various parts of the body and then release them and fill them with air.

The Alexander approach is also helpful when relaxing, but it requires a trained teacher.

Discuss Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants) Scripture Mark-Up

| Title: Enunciation/Annunciation | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: This exercise is based off the teachings of Arthur Lessac in <i>The Use and Training of the Human Voice: a Bio-Dynamic Approach to Vocal Life</i>. His work can be applied to all public speaking clarity activities. In this classroom experience, his basics will only be touched upon. A few examples will be explained. More intense study of this technique takes a lot more time.</p> <p>Example: The word “sixths” is one of the most complicated words for consonant sounds. Say it slowly and see what sounds you can hear.</p> <p>Example: Voiced and unvoiced consonants. The sounds for “d” and “t” are made the same way in the mouth with the tongue. The only difference is one is voiced and one is unvoiced.</p> | <p>Questions would be asked during the discovery process in this exercise.</p> |

**Class 10: Discuss Enunciation/Annunciation (Vowels, Consonants) Part II
(See Part I Above)**

Space (Implicit, Explicit, Senses, Describe)

| Title: Space Exploration | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: This is a time to analyze the preaching space. It is a time to play in the space. First just taking time to notice what is explicitly and implicitly being implied by the space. Then it is fun to talk about how the space is sacred, but still approachable and playful. Together those participating will play in the space. They will move at different tempos, use their voices at various volumes, and so forth.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste in the space? 2. What is explicit in the space? 3. What is implicitly implied? |

Group Games

| Title: Group Games | Assessment Questions: |
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| <p>Explanation: Group games have many different advantages. They help people learn to focus inward and outward at the same time. They help concentration and focus. They build teamwork and trust. There are many different group building games. An example of one is below. Example: Toss and Catch is a game where with balls or stuffed animals (beanie baby size) are tossed to every person once in a circle. The first time through it is a slow process as everyone makes sure they have had the ball just one time. The final person to get the ball should be the person who started. Repeat the same pattern with one ball again. Then quickly begin to add more balls to the same pattern. Make it more challenging by adding time limits or having to start over when just one ball falls.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was that experience like? 2. What was frustrating? 3. How does this exercise relate to preaching? |

Student Sermon Evaluation Questions

The student audience participant should pick out a few questions and explain what worked or did not work from the performance approach.

- 1. Where was the passion in the sermon? Explain.**
- 2. Did the preacher seem engaged in the moment?**
- 3. Name some discoveries made in the sermon.**
- 4. Where was the dramatic variety?**
- 5. Were there clear beginnings, middles, and ends? Explain.**
- 6. Were you engaged in what was being said?**
- 7. What creative elements did you notice?**
- 8. Were basic rhetorical skills done well?**
- 9. What was the presence of the preacher like?**
- 10. What did the preacher want most to express in the sermon?**

APPENDIX B

My initial plan was to interview two homiletics professors who use performance theory in their work.¹ On January 25, 2012 I sat down and interviewed Richard F. Ward, a professor of homiletics.²

There were two primary areas of focus set out before this interview. A third area of interest became apparent through the discussion. Dr. Ward's books *Speaking from the Heart* and *Speaking of the Holy* has been a part of the foundation that has built this project. I wanted to know how he came to integrate acting with preaching. I then wanted to see how he actually applied the theories in his books in his classes. From the discussion of his classwork came the third area of interest, online education. As many seminaries move toward more online classes, Ward has been working on how to apply his performance methods to this new format.

Ward's Performance Background

It was not surprising that Ward came to his performance study approach through being an active participant in theatre. He consistently went back and forth from the church to the theatre in high school, college, and in his early life. As his understanding of the world and his faith was formed he began to see the parallels between preaching and plays.

Ward's father is a moderate Baptist preacher, but Ward is ordained in the United Church of Christ. Growing up the Evangelical preaching style, rooted in the biblical texts, is what Ward knew best. The persuasive element of this didactic style of preaching is a call to conversion. These were "committed, passionate, full of conviction" sermons. They

¹ Initially this interview was to include another professor of homiletics Jana Childers, but due to a serious medical emergency in her family, she was not available.

² Richard Ward, interview by Olivia Bryan Updegrave.

had dramatic elements which called the congregation to experience a type of crisis that had to be overcome through committing one's life to Jesus. Later on, Ward saw this same pattern of overcoming a crisis in plays. Plays, to him, move in an Aristotelian way of conflict and a resolution.

As Ward went through his own self-discovery process typical of young adults, he began to question his faith. What continued to hold him to the church was preaching. At the same time he found himself beginning to perform in serious dramas. After college, Ward began working at the Dallas Theatre Center. This company saw humanity as creative and Ward agreed. While there, Ward did a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting and Directing. He also would travel to hear John Claypool preach. Theatre and preaching continued to both be a part of his life.

After his time in Dallas, Ward began to teach at his undergraduate school, Oklahoma Baptist University. He discovered he liked the teaching atmosphere, but needed a less conservative environment. Ward then attended Christian Theological Seminary because of its theatre program that did a wider variety of productions. It was here that Ward had professors who began to understand that he was trying to look at the arts and ask, "How does one think theologically about the arts?" This question continued when he went to Northwestern University to complete his PhD. His PhD work was on examining the Gospel of Mark as tragedy. As he began to learn more about performance studies, Ward began to ask why the Bible was not included in performance studies.

Ward was becoming a part of the early days of what David Rhodes would later term performance criticism. Ward applied performance criticism to Paul's letters to Corinth. He argued that Paul was able to overcome his negative criticism in Corinth by

reestablishing credibility through those who performed his letters. Over time Ward has develop his methods as he has taught at different seminaries. He continues to teach “. . . performance as a hermeneutical guide for scripture given the fact that the Bible has such a close proximity and, in fact, arose out of a vital set of conflicting oral traditions.” Ward has also started working with students who are applying performance theories to not just the preacher, but to the church. The church is called to perform the gospel in culture. The danger is that many congregants are amateur performers. Ward says, “Performance studies must account for who is performing for whom, when?”

Comparing Education Tools and Theories

Ward sent his *Introduction to Preaching* course syllabus to compare with my syllabus. In his overall preaching education Ward feels that he has to begin with really basic rhetoric.

Ward explains to his students that performance allows a person to embody the scriptural experience. He uses Childers’ image of birthing the sermon. Ward does not argue that the sermon is performance, but instead leads them in an experience. When Ward does teach an upper level course that works with students seeing scriptural words *as if* they were their own words, they are terrified at first, but ultimately find a sense of joy in connecting to the scripture. He then builds on that feeling. I would argue that this latter experience should be part of the basic preaching instruction and can be done by intentionally combining basics of both preaching and acting in preaching introduction courses.

The goals and methods in Ward’s introduction class are similar to some of the concepts throughout this project paper. He emphasizes the importance of listening and

observing in the first five weeks. Listening is the word that he would use where I would use awareness more often. The concept is still the same. By listening and becoming aware, a person is able to respond creatively. This process of listening and observing can help develop homiletic ideas from texts, topics, or even social issues.

There are some key differences. Performance methods seem to be an afterthought for Ward's course. Ward's syllabus still focuses on discussion and more head-oriented thought processes. Even listening is a more inward skill. My coursework combines inward and outward approaches simultaneously. Ward's coursework does not provide a lot of outward to inward approaches. Even when his syllabus moves away from listening into perceiving the sermon as a creative process, the discussion topics are not from a theatrical perspective but the wide variety of homiletic forms. These are not playful performance approaches, but regular homiletic basics. Awareness of these basics is important, but they do not create a consistently creative performance. My goal is to use both preaching and performative basics concurrently, even when limited to only introductory level courses or workshops. Basic rhetoric and knowledge have more difficulty leading a preacher to produce inspiring sermons consistently in church pastorates.

The difference between these two syllabi becomes clear in that Ward's is an introductory level course to homiletics with some performative elements. My syllabus focuses on introducing performative elements simultaneously with basic homiletics. Ward is making his students aware of the tools provided by current homileticians. My work takes that to another level and uses current performative homiletic teachers in conversation with acting teaching methods. Ward describes what is currently happening

in homiletic circles as a type of Pentecost. Everyone is saying the same thing, but no one is speaking the same language. By creating a similar language we can communicate to the culture more clearly the stories of faith.

Online Education

Ward recently completed a trajectory statement about his experience with teaching preaching online. The set up for online teaching is different than the introductory syllabus standard. Online courses currently use “Blackboard” which is an internet site that allows a professor to post a syllabus, handouts, video presentations, and class discussions. Ward said that when it became time to focus on the student’s performance it was more challenging.

The study of online preaching education could be a doctorate of ministry project unto itself. After briefly talking to Ward and reading his insights about this educational change, I think online preaching preparation is an exciting alteration. The sermon for a class will not just be in a classroom setting, but a video of real interaction with the congregation. The variety of settings, responses, and use of space builds directly off of acting methods. This change provides more discussion and discernment opportunities to see how communication is expressed beyond just words. This new way of teaching provides students time to “play” with what they have watched and experienced outside a three hour classroom limitation.

Conclusion

When I began this project, I was concerned that combining the voices of acting methods and preaching methods had already been done. I knew there were preaching professors who were using performative approaches in some of their teaching methods. I

have discovered, however, that these professors are still not leading their students to consistently engage in dialogue between the two mediums. Classes and workshops are still mostly focused on head-oriented, homiletic methods. By overlapping the two mediums, there is potential for a common language, an expanded skill set that is physical, mental, and emotional, and healthier ways for pastors to respond to their callings and lead their churches to respond to their callings. Acting methods provide a better foundation for consistently truthful and inspiring preaching than the scattered and inconsistent variety of homiletic methods. If preaching education is just basic rhetoric and exegetical study, then sermons are basic non-emotional, but informative, speeches.

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